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UP AND DOWN

E. F. BENSON

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BY E. F. BENSON

UP AND DOWN

AN AUTUMN SOWING

CRESCENT AND IRON CROSS

THE TORTOISE

THE FREAKS OF MAYFAIR

DAVID BLAIZE

MICHAEL

THE OAKLEYITES

ARUNDEL

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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UP AND DOWN

BY

E. F. BENSON
Author of "Dodo," "David Blaize," etc.

NEW YORK
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UP AND DOWN

MAY, 1914.

I do not know whether in remote generations some trickle of Italian blood went to the making of that entity which I feel to be myself, or whether in some previous incarnation I enjoyed a Latin existence, nor do I greatly care: all that really concerns me is that the moment the train crawls out from its burrowings through the black roots of pine-scented mountains into the southern openings of the Alpine tunnels, I am conscious that I have come home. I greet the new heaven and the new earth, or, perhaps more accurately, the beloved old heaven and the beloved old earth; I hail the sun, and know that something within me has slept and dreamed and yearned while I lived up in the north, and wakes again now with the awakening of Brünnhilde. . . .

The conviction is as unfathomable and as impervious to analysis as the springs of character, and if it is an illusion I am deceived by it as completely as by some master-trick of conjuring. It is not merely that I love for their own sakes the liquid and dustless thoroughfares of Venice, the dim cool churches and galleries that glow with the jewels of

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Bellini and Tintoret, the push of the gliding gondola round the corners of the narrow canals beneath the mouldering cornices and mellow brickwork, for I should love these things wherever they happened to be, and the actual spell of Venice would be potent if Venice was situated in the United States of America or in Manchester. But right at the back of all Venetian sounds and scents and sights sits enthroned the fact that the theatre of those things is in Italy. Florence has her spell, too, when from the hills above it in the early morning you see her hundred towers pricking the mists; Rome the imperial has her spell, when at sunset you wander through the Forum and see the small blue campanulas bubbling out of the crumbling travertine, while the Coliseum glows like a furnace of molten amber, or pushing aside the leather curtain you pass into the huge hushed halls of St. Peter's; Naples has her spell, and the hill-side of Assisi hers, but all these are but the blossoms that cluster on the imperishable stem that nourishes them. Yet for all the waving of these wands, it is not Bellini nor Tintoret, nor Pope nor Emperor who gives the spells their potency, but Italy, the fact of Italy. Indeed (if in soul you are an Italian) you will find the spell not only and not so fully in the churches and forums and galleries of cities, but on empty hill-sides and in orchards, where the vine grows in garlands from tree to tree, and the purple clusters of shadowed grapes alternate with the pale sunshine of the ripened lemons. There, more than among marbles,

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you get close to that which the lover of Italy adores in her inviolable shrine, and if you say that such adoration is very easily explicable since lemon trees and vines are beautiful things, we will take some example that shall be really devoid of beauty to anyone who has not Italy in his heart, but to her lover is more characteristic of her than any of her conventional manifestations.

So imagine yourself standing on a hilly road ankledeep in dust. On one side of it is a wine-shop, in the open doorway of which sits a lean, dishevelled cat, while from the dim interior there oozes out a stale sour smell of spilt wine mingled with the odour of frying oil. A rough wooden balcony projects from the stained stucco of the house-front, and on the lip of the balcony is perched a row of petroleum tins, in which are planted half a dozen unprosperous carnations. An oblong of sharp-edged shadow stretches across the road; but you, the lover of Italy, stand in the white of the scorching sunshine, blinded by the dazzle, choked by the dust, and streaming with the heat. On the side of the road opposite the wine-shop is a boulder-built wall, buttressing the hillside; a little behind the wall stands a grey-foliaged olive-tree, and on the wall, motionless but tense as a curled spring, lies a dappled lizard. From somewhere up the road comes the jingle of bells and the sound of a cracked whip, and presently round the corner swings a dingy little victoria drawn by two thin horses decorated between their ears with a plume of a pheasant's tail

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feathers. The driver sits cross-legged on the box, with a red flower behind his ear, and inside are three alien English folk with puggarees and parasols and Baedekers. You step aside into the gutter to avoid the equipage, and as he passes, the driver, with a white-toothed smile, raises and flourishes his hat and says, "Giorno, signor!" The lizard darts into a crevice from which his tail protrudes, the carriage yaws along in a cloud of dust. . . . It all sounds marvellously ugly and uncomfortable, and yet, if you are an exiled Italian, the thought of it will bring your heart into your mouth.

It was just this, of which I have given the unvarnished but faithful jotting, that I saw this morning as I came up from my bathe, and all at once it struck me that this, after all, more than all the forums and galleries, and gleams of past splendour and glory of light and landscape, revealed Italy. But that was all there was to it, the sense of the lizard and the dust and the *trattoria,* and yet never before had my mistress worn so translucent a veil, or so nearly shown me the secret of her elusive charm. Never had I come so near to catching it; for the moment, as the Baedekers went by, I thought that by contrast I should comprehend at last what it is that makes to me the sense of home in the "dark and fierce and fickle south," as one of our Laureates so inappropriately calls it, having no more sympathy with Italy than I with Lapland. For the moment the secret was trembling in the spirit, ready to flower in the understanding. . . . But

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then it passed away again in the dust or the wine-smell, and when I tried to express to Francis at lunch in beautiful language what I have here written, he thought it over impartially, and said: "It sounds like when you all but sneeze, and can't quite manage it." And there was point in that prosaic reflection: the secret remained inaccessible somewhere within me, like the sneeze.

Francis has been an exceedingly wise person in the conduct of his life. Some fifteen years ago he settled, much to the dismay of his uncle, who thought that all gentlemen were stockbrokers, that he liked Italy much better than any other country in the world, and that, of all the towns and mountains and plains of Italy, he loved best this rocky pinnacle of an island that rises sheer from the sapphire in the mouth of the Bay of Naples. Thus, having come across from Naples for the inside of a day, he telegraphed to his hotel for his luggage and stopped a month. After a brief absence in England, feverish with interviews, he proceeded to stop here for a year, and, when that year was over, to stop here permanently. He was always unwell in England and always well here; there was no material reason why he should ever return to the fogs, nor any moral reason except that the English idea of duty seems to be inextricably entwined with the necessity of doing something you dislike and are quite unfitted for. So herein he showed true wisdom, firstly, in knowing what he liked, and secondly, in doing it. For many otherwise sensible people

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have not the slightest idea what they like, and a large proportion of that elect remainder have not the steadfastness to do it. But Francis, with no ties that bound him to the island of England, which did not suit him at all, had the good sense to make his home in this island of Italy that did. Otherwise he most certainly would have lived anæmically in an office in the City, and have amassed money that he did not in the least want. And though it was thought very odd that he should have chosen to be cheerful and busy here rather than occupied and miserable in London, I applaud the unworldliness of his wisdom. He settled also (which is a rarer wisdom) that he wanted to think, and, as you will see before this record of diary is out, he succeeded in so doing.

Many Mays and Junes I spent with him here, and six months ago now, while I was groping and choking in the fogs, he wrote to me, saying that the Villa Tiberiana, at which we had for years cast longing glances as at a castle in Spain, was to be let on lease. It was too big for him alone, but if I felt inclined to go shares in the rent, we might take it together. I sent an affirmative telegram, and sat stewing with anxiety till I received his favourable reply. So, when a fortnight ago I returned here, I made my return home not to Italy alone, but to my home in Italy.

The Villa Tiberiana, though not quite so imperial as it sounds, is one of the most "amiable dwellings." It stands high on the hill-side above the huddled, picturesque little town of Alatri, and is approachable

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only by a steep cobbled path that winds deviously between other scattered houses and plots of vineyard. Having arrived at the piazza of the town, the carriage road goes no further, and you must needs walk, while your luggage is conveyed up by strapping female porters, whom on their arrival you reward with *soldi* and refresh with wine. White-washed and thick-built, two-storied and flat-roofed, it crouches behind the tall rubble wall of its garden that lies in terraces below it. A great stone-pine rears its whispering umbrella in the middle of this plot, and now in the May-time of the year there is to be seen scarcely a foot of the earth of its garden beds, so dense is the tapestry of flowers that lies embroidered over it. For here in the far south of Europe, the droughts of summer and early autumn render unpractical any horticultural legislation with a view to securing colour in your flower-beds all the year round. However much you legislated, you would never get your garden to be gay through July and August, and so, resigning yourself to emptiness then, you console yourself with an intoxication of blossom from March to June. And never was a garden so drunk with colour as is ours to-day; never have I seen so outrageous a riot. Nor is it in the garden-beds alone that rose and carnation and hollyhock and nasturtium and delphinium unpunctually but simultaneously sing and blaze together. The southern front of the house is hidden in plumbago and vines with green seed-pearl berries, and as for the long garden wall, it is literally invisible under

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the cloak of blue morning-glory that decks it as with a raiment from foundation to coping-stone. Every morning fresh battalions of blue trumpets deploy there as soon as the sun strikes it, and often as I have seen it thus, I cannot bring myself to believe that it is real; it is more like some amazing theatrical decoration. Beyond on the further side lies the orchard of fig and peach, and I observe with some emotion that the figs, like the lady in Pickwick, are swelling visibly.

Within, the house has assumed its summer toilet, which is another way of saying that it has been undressed; carpets and curtains have been banished; doors are latched back, and the air sweeps softly from end to end of it. A sitting-room that faces south has been dismantled, and its contents put in the big studio that looks northwards, and even in the height of summer, we hope, will not get over-hot, especially since a few days ago we had the roof whitewashed and thick matting hung over its one southern window. Breakfast and dinner, now that the true May weather has begun, we have on the terrace-top of the big cistern in the garden, roofed over between the pilasters of its pergola with trellis, through which the vineleaves wriggle and wrestle. But now at noon it is too hot in the garden, and to-day I found lunch ready in the square vaulted little dining-room, with Pasqualino bringing in macaroni and vine-leaf-stoppered decanter, and Francis, who refrained from bathing this morning owing to the Martha-cares of the household, debating with Seraphina (the cook)

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is to whether the plumbago ought not to be pruned. It has come right into the room, and, as Seraphina most justly remarks, it is already impossible to shut the window. But since we shall not need to shut the window for some months to come, I give my vote to support Francis, and suffer the plumbago to do exactly as it likes. So we are two to one, and Seraphina takes her defeat, wreathed in smiles, and says it is not her fault if burglars come. That is a poor argument, for there are no burglars in Alatri, and, besides, there is nothing to steal except the grand piano. . . .

Just now social duties weigh rather heavily on Francis and me, for the British colony in Alatri consider that, as we have moved into a new house, they must behave to us as if we were new-comers, and have been paying formal visits. These civilities must be responded to, and we have had two house-warmings and are going to have a third and last to-day. The house-warmings should perhaps be described as garden-warmings, since we have tea on the terrace in great pomp, and then get cool in the house afterwards. Rather embarrassing incidents have occurred, as, for instance, when Miss Machonochie came to a garden-warming the day before yesterday. She is a red amiable Scotchwoman, with a prodigious Highland accent, which Francis, whom she has for years tried to marry, imitates to perfection. So perfect, indeed, is his mimicry of it, that when Miss Machonochie appeared and began to talk about the wee braw garden, Pasqualino, who was

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bringing out a fresh teapot, had to put it hurriedly down on the ground, and run back again into the kitchen, from which issued peal after peal of laughter. So overcome was he, that after a second attempt (Miss Machonochie being still full of conversation) he had to retire again, and Seraphina must serve us till Miss Machonochie went away. This she did not do for a long time, since, after just a little vermouth, she wanted no persuasion at all to sing a quantity of Scotch ditties about Bonnie Charlie and Loch Lomond, and other beautiful and interesting topics. Technically, I should say that she had one note in her voice, which she was in a great hurry to get on to and very loath to leave. This had an amazing timbre like a steam siren, and as I played her accompaniment for her, my left ear sang all the evening afterwards. But her accent was indubitably Highland, and Mrs. Macgregor declared she could smell the heather. I was glad of that, for I was afraid that what I smelled (it being now near dinner-time) was the *fritura* that Seraphina was preparing in the kitchen.

This island-life is the busiest sort of existence, though I suppose a stockbroker would say it was the laziest, and, in consequence, these social efforts give one a sense of rush that I have never felt in London. The whole of the morning is taken up with bathing (of which more presently), and on the way up you call at the post-office for papers and letters. The letters it is impossible to answer immediately, since there is so much to do, and the pile on my table

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grows steadily, waiting for a wet day. After lunch you read the papers, and then, following the example of the natives, who may be supposed to know the proper way of living in their own climate, you have a good siesta. After tea, the English habit of physical exercise asserts itself, and we walk or water the garden till dinner. After dinner it is, I take it, permissible to have a little relaxation, and we either play a game or two of picquet up here in the studio, or more often stroll down to the piazza and play in the café, or attend a thrilling cinematograph show. In the country it is natural to go to bed early, and, behold, it is to-morrow almost before you knew it was to-day. When it rains, or when the weather is cold, it is possible to do some work, and Francis asserts that he does an immense quantity during the winter. I daresay that is so; I should be the last person to quarrel with the statement, since he so amiably agrees that it is impossible to behave like that in the summer.

The mind is equally well occupied, for we always take down books to the bathing-place, and for the rest the affairs of the island, Pasqualino and his family, Seraphina and her family, the fact that Mrs. Macgregor has dismissed her cook, that Mr. Tarn has built a pergola, completely absorb the intellectual and speculative faculties. What happens outside the island seems not to matter at all. England, with its fogs and its fuss, is less real and much further away than the hazy shores of the mainland, where all that concerns us is the smoke of Vesuvius,

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which during the last week has been increasing in volume, and now stands up above the mountain like a huge stone-pine. The wiseacres shake their heads and prophesy an eruption, but *che sarà, sarà*—if it comes, it comes, and meantime it is a marvellous thing to see the red level rays at sunset turn the edges of the smoke-cloud into wreaths of rose-colour and crimson; the denser portions they are unable to pierce, and can but lay a wash of colour on them, through which the black shows like a thing of nightmare. In the calm weather, which we have been having, this stone-pine of smoke is reflected in the bay, and the great tree of vapour steals slowly across the water, nearer and nearer every day. The observatory reports tell us that its topmost wreaths are eight vertical miles away from the earth. Sometimes when it is quite calm here we see these tops torn by winds and blown about into fantastic foliage, but the solidity of the trunk remains untouched.

But Vesuvius is far away, twenty-five miles at the least, and here in this siren, lotus-eating island nothing across the sea really interests us. But island affairs, as I have said, are perfectly absorbing, and during this last fortnight we have been in vertiginous heights of excitement. Only yesterday occurred the *finale* of all this business, and Francis thinks with excellent reason, that he is accomplice to a felony. The person chiefly concerned was Luigi, nephew of our cook Seraphina, who till six months ago was valet, butler, major-domo, and gardener to Francis. Then, in a misguided moment, he thought

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to "better himself" by going as hall-boy to the Grand Hotel in Alatri. There were tips, no doubt, in the tourist season at the Grand Hotel, but there was also trouble. It happened like this.

From the day of the supposed crime the sympathy of the island generally was on the side of Luigi, in the fiery trials that awaited him. It was felt to be intolerable that a boy who had just changed into his best clothes, and had taken a carnation from one of the tables in the dining-room, and was actually going out of the hotel gate to spend the afternoon of the *festa* in the Piazza, should have been summarily ordered back by the porter, and commanded to show a fat white German gentleman, who was staying in the hotel, the way to the bathing-place at the *Palazzo a mare,* and carry his towels and bathing-dress for him, the latter of which included sandals, so that the fat white gentleman should not hurt his fat white toes on the shingle. This abominable personage had also preferred, in the unaccountable manner of foreigners, to go all the way on foot, instead of taking a victoria, which would have conveyed him three-quarters of the distance and saved much time. But he would go on his feet, and being very fat had walked at tortoise-pace along the dusty road, under a large green umbrella, perspiring profusely, and stopping every now and then to sit down. There was Luigi standing by, carrying the sandals and the bathing-dress and the towels, while all the time the precious moments of this holiday afternoon were slipping along, and the Piazza, where Luigi

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should have been (having been granted a half-holiday on account of the *festa*), was full of his young friends, male and female, all in their best clothes, conversing and laughing together, and standing about and smoking an occasional cigarette, in the orthodox fashion of a holiday afternoon. Then, after this interminable walk, during which the German gentleman kept asking the baffled Luigi a series of questions in an unknown tongue, and appeared singularly annoyed when the boy was unable to answer him except in a Tower-of-Babel manner, he drew three coppers from his pocket, and after a prolonged mental struggle, presented Luigi with two of them, as a reward for his services. He then told him that he could find his way up again alone, and having undressed, swam majestically off round the promontory of rock that enclosed the bathing-beach.

An hour afterwards Luigi, defrauded of half his holiday afternoon, returned to the gaiety and companionship of the Piazza, and recounted to an indignant audience this outrageous affair. But some time during the afternoon, Francis, looking out of his bedroom window after his siesta, thought he saw Luigi slipping across the garden of the Villa Tiberiana, and climbing down over the wall at the bottom. He says he was not sure, being still sleepy, and when he shouted Luigi's name out of his window, there came no answer.

Luigi returned to the Grand Hotel in time to get into his livery again before dinner, and on entrance was summoned into the manager's bureau, where he

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was confronted with his Teutonic taskmaster of the afternoon, and charged with having picked his pocket while he was bathing. A portfolio was missing, containing a note for a hundred liras, and this the German gentleman was gutturally certain he had on his person when he started off to bathe, and equally certain that he had lost when he came to dress for dinner. His certainty was partly founded on the fact that he had tipped the boy when they arrived at the *Palazzo a mare,* and to have tipped him he must have had his money in his pocket. In answer, Luigi absolutely denied the charge, and then made a dreadful mistake by suggesting that the Signor had a hole in his pocket, through which the portfolio had slipped. This was quite the most unfortunate thing he could have said, for, as the German gentleman instantly demonstrated, the hole in his pocket was undoubtedly there. But how, so he overpoweringly urged, could Luigi have known there was a hole there, unless he had been examining his pockets? And an hour later poor Luigi, with gyves upon his wrists, was ignominiously led through the Piazza, all blazing with acetylene lights and resonant with the blare of the band, and was clapped into prison to await the formal charge.

Arrived there, he was searched, and a similar examination was made in his room at his mother's house, where he went to sleep at night, but nothing that ever so remotely resembled a German portfolio or a note for a hundred liras was found, and he still doggedly denied his guilt. Then, since nothing in-

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criminating could be got out of him, the key was turned, while through the small high-grated window came the sound of the band in the Piazza for this *festa* night. Later, by standing on his board bed, he could see the fiery segment of the aspiring path of the rockets, as they ascended from the peak above the Piazza, and listen to the echo of their explosions flap and buffet against the cliffs of Monte Gennaro. But it was from prison that he saw and heard.

Outside in the Piazza the tragic history of his incarceration formed a fine subject for talk, and public opinion, which cheerfully supposed him guilty, found extenuating circumstances that almost amounted to innocence. The provocation of being obliged to spend the best part of a *festa* afternoon in walking down to the sea with a fat white Tedesco was really immense, and the reward of twopence for those lost hours of holiday was nothing less than an insult. What wonder if Luigi for a moment mislaid his honesty, what wonder if when so smooth-faced and ready-made a temptation came, he just yielded to it for a second? Certainly it was wrong to steal, everyone knows that—*Mamma mia,* what a rocket, what a *bellezza* of stars!—but it was also primarily wrong to dock a jolly boy of his promised half-holiday. No wonder, when the German signor—ah, it was the same, no doubt, as was sick in Antonio's carriage the other day, and refused to pay for a new rug—no wonder, when that fat-head, that pumpkin (for who but a pumpkin would carry a hundred liras about with him?) swam away round

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the corner of those rocks, that Luigi's hand just paid a visit to his great pockets to see if he was as poor as that miserable tip of twopence seemed to say! Then he found the portfolio, and turned bitter with the thought of the *quattro soldi* which was all that had been given him for his loss of the half-holiday. Ah, look! Was it really a wheel like that on which Santa Caterina had been bound? How she must have spun round! What giddiness! What burning! A steadfast soul not to have consented to worship Apollo; no wonder that Holy Church made a saint of her. But what could Luigi have done with the portfolio and the note for a hundred liras? He had been searched and on him was nothing found; his room had been searched, but there was nothing there. Was it possible that he was innocent, *il povero?* Could the sick German gentleman really have lost his foolish pocket-book by natural means as he came up from his bathe? It might be worth while taking a walk there to-morrow, always keeping a peeled eye on the margin of the path. It was possible, after all, that he had lost his pocket-book all by himself, without aid from Luigi, for the hole in his pocket was admitted, and shown to the manager of the Grand Hotel. But then there was Luigi's fatal knowledge of the hole in his pocket. That was very bad; that looked like guilt. If only the boy had held his tongue and not said that fatal thing! He only suggested that there was a hole in his pocket? No, no; he said there *was* a hole in his pocket, didn't he? What a lesson to keep the tongue

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still! Luigi had always a lot to learn about keeping the tongue still, for who will soon forget the dreadful things he shouted out last winter at the priest, his mother's cousin's uncle, when he had smacked his head? They were quite true, too, like the hole in the pocket. . . . Ah, there is the great bomb. Pouf! How it echoes! So the fireworks are over! *Buona notte! Buona notte!*

All this, while lounging in the Piazza, listening to the band and watching the fireworks, I heard from the tobacconist and the barber and a few other friends. I coupled with this information that which Francis told me as we strolled up homewards again, namely, that he thought he had seen Luigi that afternoon slipping through the garden. He was not sure about it, so leaving it aside, he recalled a few facts about Luigi when he was in his service. He used to hurry over his house-work always, for he preferred his rôle of gardener to all others, and used to wander among the flower-beds, making plants comfortable, and giving this one a drop of water, and that a fresh piece of stick to lean on. Then he would make a mud pie by turning on the cistern tap, and plant verbenas in it, or in more mysterious fashion made *caches* in a hole behind loose masonry in the cistern wall. Francis has got a just appreciation of the secrecy and rapture of making *caches*, and never let Luigi know that he was aware of this hidden treasure. But after Luigi had gone home to his mother's of an evening, he would yield to

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curiosity and see what the boy had put there. Sometimes there would be a matchbox, or a pilfered cigarette, or a piece of string carefully wrapped up in paper. . . . And now poor Luigi was behind his grated window, and Seraphina, with deepest sarcasm, said that this was what he called bettering himself. He would have done better to have done worse and remained at the Villa Tiberiana in the service of the Signori.

But suddenly next day, like a change in the weather coming from a cloudless sky, a fresh train of thought was suggested by the Luigi-episode, and the mention of the lottery, and how the various incidents and personages bore on the luck of numbers. On the instant Luigi and all he had done or not done ceased to interest anybody except in so far as the events were concerned with the science and interpretation of numbers in the lottery as set forth in the amazing volume called "Smorfia." There you will find what any numeral means, so that should an earthquake occur or an eclipse, the wise speculator looks out "earthquake" or "eclipse" in "Smorfia," and at the next drawing of the National Lottery or the lottery at Naples backs the numbers to which these significations are attached. As it happened, no event of striking local interest had occurred in Alatri since, in April last, the carpenter in the Corso Agosto had unsuccessfully attempted to cut his throat with a razor, after successfully smothering his aunt. This had been the last occasion on which

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there was clear guidance as to the choice of numbers in the Naples lottery, and nobody of a sporting turn of mind who had the smallest sense of the opportunities life offers had failed to back No. 17, which among other things means "aunt," and numbers which signified "razor," "throat," "blood" and "bolster." Nor had "Smorfia," the dictionary that gives this useful information, disappointed its adherents, for Carmine, Pasqualino's brother, had backed the numbers that meant "throat," "razor," "carpenter," "aunt" and "Sunday," the last being the day on which those distressing events occurred, and went to bed that night to dream of the glories which awaited him who nominated a *quinterno secco.* (This means that you back five numbers, all of which come out in the order named.) Once, so succulent tradition said, a baker at the Marina had accomplished this enviable feat, after which Alatri saw him no more, for his reward was a million francs, a marquisate and an estate in Calabria, where soon afterwards he was murdered for the sake of his million. This stimulating page of history was not wholly repeated in the case of Carmine and the carpenter's aunt, but by his judicious selection he had certainly reaped two hundred francs where he had only sowed five. The doctor also, who had attended the abortive suicide, had done very well by backing salient features of the tragedy, and astute superstition had, on the whole, been adequately rewarded.

Next day, accordingly, the Piazza seethed with excitement as to the due application of the Luigi

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episode to the enchanting Lorelei of the lottery. It had magnificent and well-marked features; "Smorfia" shouted with opportunities. First of all, there was Luigi himself to be backed, and, as everyone knew; "boy" was the number 2. Next there was the German gentleman. ("Michele, turn up 'German.'") Then there was "pocket" and "hole" and "portfolio" and "bathe." All these were likely chances. Other aspects of the affair struck the serious mind. *"Festa"* was connected with it; so, too, was "prison," where now Luigi languished. Then there was "theft" and "denial." Here were abundant materials for a *quinterno secco,* when once the initial difficulty of selecting the right numbers was surmounted. And marquisates and millions hovered on the horizon, ready to move up and descend on Alatri.

Among those who were thus interested in the *affaire Luigi* from the purely lottery point of view, there was no more eager student than the boy's mother. Maria was a confirmed and steadfast gambler, of that optimistic type that feels itself amply rewarded for the expenditure of ten liras on a series of numbers that prove quite barren of reward, if at the eleventh attempt she gained five. She had been to see her son in prison, had wept a little and consoled him a little, had smuggled a packet of cigarettes into his hand, and had reminded him that the same sort of thing, though far worse, had happened to his father, with whom be peace. For at the most Luigi would get but a couple of months in prison, owing

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to his youth (and the cool of the cell was really not unpleasant in the hot weather), and the severity of his sentence would doubtless be much mitigated if he would only say where he had hidden the portfolio and the hundred liras. But nothing would induce Luigi to do this; he still firmly adhered to his innocence, and repeated *ad nauseam* his unfortunate remark that there was a hole in the fat German's pocket.

Expostulation being useless, and Luigi being fairly comfortable, Maria left him, and on her way home gave very serious consideration to the features of the case which she intended to back at the lottery. She had ascertained that Luigi had his new clothes on (which was the sort of flower on which that butterfly Chance alighted), and on looking up the number of "new clothes, novelty, freshness," found that it was 8. Then, on further study of "Smorfia," she learned that the word "thief" was represented by No. 28, and following her own train of thought, discovered that No. 88 meant "liar." Here was a strange thing, especially when, with an emotional spasm, she remembered that "boy" was No. 2. Here was the whole adventure nutshelled for her. For was there not a boy (2) who put on his new clothes (8), showed himself a thief (28) and subsequently a liar (88)? 2 and 8 covered the whole thing, and almost throttled by the thread of coincidence, she hurried down to the lottery-office, aflame with the premonition of some staggering success, and invested fifteen liras in the numbers 2, 8, 28, 88.

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She lingered in the Piazza a little, after laying this touching garland on the altar of luck, to receive the condolences of her friends on Luigi's wickedness, and had a kind word thrown to her by Signor Gelotti, the great lawyer, who had come over for a week's holiday to his native island. Ah, there was a man! Why, if he got you into the witness-box, he could make you contradict yourself before you knew you had opened your mouth. Give him a couple of minutes at you, and he would make you say that the man you had described as having a black coat and a moustache had no coat at all and whiskers, and that, though you had met him at three o'clock precisely in the Piazza, you had just informed the Court that at that hour you were having a siesta in your own house. Luigi's father had at one time been in his service, and though he had left it, handcuffed, for a longer period of imprisonment than his son was threatened with, Lawyer Gelotti had always a nod and a smile for his widow, and to-day a pleasant little joke about heredity. Ah, if Lawyer Gelotti would only take up the case! He would muddle everybody up finely, and in especial that fat German fellow, who, like his beastly, swaggering, truculent race, was determined to press home his charge. But Lawyer Gelotti, as all the world knew, never held up his forefinger at a witness under a thousand liras. What a forefinger! It made you tell two more lies in order to escape from each lie that you had already told.

Three days passed, while still Luigi languished

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behind bars, and then a sudden thrill of excitement emanating from the offices of the lottery swept over the island. For the Naples lottery had been drawn, and the five winning numbers were issued, which in due order of their occurrence were 2, 8, 28, 4, 91. Alatri grew rosy with prospective riches, for in this *affaire Luigi* it would have been slapping the face of the Providence that looks after lotteries not to have backed No. 2 (boy) and No. 28 (thief). At least ten dutiful folk had done that. But—*che peccato*—why did we not all back No. 8, as Luigi's mother had done, for we all knew that Luigi must have had his new clothes on, as did every boy on a *festa?* What a thing it is to use rightly the knowledge you possess! The lucky woman! She had won a *terno,* for the first three numbers she backed came out in the order she nominated. Never was such a thing seen since the days of the classical baker! Why, her *terno* would be worth three thousand liras at least, which was next door to the title of a marchioness. But No. 91 now: what does No. 91 mean? Quick, turn it up in "Smorfia"! Who has a "Smorfia?" Ernesto, the tobacconist, of course, but he is a mean man, and will not lend his "Smorfia" to any who does not buy a packet of cigarettes. Never mind, let us have both; a cigarette is always a cigarette. There! No. 91! What does No. 91 signify? *Dio!* What a lot of meanings! "The man in the moon" . . . "the hairs on the tail of an elephant" . . . "an empty egg-shell." . . . Who ever heard the like? There is no sense in such a number! And No. 4—

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what does No. 4 mean? Why, the very first meaning of all is "truth." There is a curious thing when we all thought that Luigi was telling lies! And No. 4, look you, was the fourth number that came out. It would have been simple to conjecture that No. 4 would be No. 4. Pity that we did not think of that last week. But it is easy to be wise after the event, as the bridegroom said.

The talk on the Piazza rose to ever loftier peaks of triumph as fresh beneficiaries of Luigi, who had made a few liras over "boy" and "thief," joined the chattering groups. He had done very well for his friends, had poor Luigi, though "pocket" and "portfolio" had brought in nothing to their backers. And it was like him—already Luigi was considered directly responsible for these windfalls—it was like him to have turned up that ridiculous No. 91, with its man in the moon, and its empty egg-shell. Luigi, the gay *ragazzo,* loved that extravagant sort of joke, of which the point was that there was no point, but which made everybody laugh, as when he affixed a label, "Three liras complete," to the fringe of Donna Margherita's new shawl from Naples as she walked about the Piazza, showing it off and never guessing what so many smiles meant. But No. 4, which stood for "truth," it was strange that No. 4 should have turned up, and that nobody dreamed of supposing that Luigi was telling the truth. His mother, for all her winnings, must be finely vexed that she had not trusted her son's word, and backed "truth," instead of putting her money on "liar." Why,

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if she backed "truth," she would have gained a *quaterno,* and God knows how many liras! Ah, there she is! Let us go and congratulate the good soul. Her winnings will make up to her for having a son as well as a husband who was a thief.

But Luigi's mother was in a hot haste. She had put on all her best clothes, not, as was at first conjectured, because in the affluence that had come to her they had been instantly degraded into second-best, but because she was making a business call on Lawyer Gelotti. She was not one to turn her broad back on her own son—though it is true that she had confidently selected No. 88 with its signification of "liar"—and if the satanic skill of Lawyer Gelotti could get Luigi off, that skill was going to be invoked for his defence. A hundred thanks, a hundred greetings to everybody, but she had no time for conversation just now. Lawyer Gelotti must be seen at once, if he was at home; if not, she must just sit on his doorstep and wait for him. Yes; she had heard that a thousand liras was his fee, and he should have it, if that was right and proper. There was plenty more where they came from! And this *bravura* passage pleased the Piazza; it showed the gaiety and swagger proper to a lady of property.

In due course followed the event which Alatri was quite prepared for when it knew that Lawyer Gelotti was engaged on Luigi's behalf, and that the full blast of his hurricane of interrogations would be turned on the fat German gentleman. Never was there such a tearing to shreds of apparently stout

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evidence; its fragments were scattered to all points of the compass like the rocket-stars which Luigi had watched from his grated window. The Tedesco was forced to allow that he had not looked in his pockets, to see if his portfolio was safe, till full three hours after he had returned from his bathe. What had he done in those three hours? He did not know? Then the Court would guess! (That was nasty!) Again he had told the manager of the hotel that he knew he had his portfolio with him when he went to bathe, because he had tipped the boy. Ah, that wonderful tip! Was it, or was it not, twopence? Yes: Lawyer Gelotti thought so! Twopence for carrying a basket of towels and a bathing costume and two elephant sandals all over the island! *Tante grazie!* But was it really his custom to carry coppers in his portfolio? Did he not usually carry pence loose in a pocket? Had he ever to his knowledge carried pennies in his portfolio? Would he swear that he had? Come, sir, do not keep the Court waiting for a simple answer! Very good! This magnificent tip did not come out of the portfolio at all, as he had previously affirmed.

Lawyer Gelotti had a tremendous lunch at this stage of the proceedings, and tackled his German afterwards with renewed vigour. Was it credible that a man so careful—let us say, so laudably careful—with his money as to make so miserly a tip, would have taken a portfolio containing a hundred liras down to the bathing-place, and left it in his clothes? And what was the number of this note?

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Surely this prudent, this economical citizen of Germany, a man so scrupulously careful of his money as to tip on this scale, would have taken the precaution to have registered the number of his note. Did he not usually do so? Yes. So Lawyer Gelotti suspected. But in this case, very strangely, he had not. That was odd; that was hard to account for except on the supposition that there was no such note. And this portfolio, about which it seemed really impossible to get accurate information? It was shabby, was it, and yet an hour before we had been told it was new! And who else had ever set eyes on this wonderful portfolio, this new and ragged portfolio with its note of unknown number? Nobody; of course, nobody.

There followed a most disagreeable forensic picture of the fat German gentleman, while above him, as a stained glass window looks down on Mephistopheles, Lawyer Gelotti proceeded to paint Luigi's portrait in such seraphic lines and colour that Maria, brimming with emotion, felt that sixteen years ago she had given birth to a saint and had never known it till now. Here was a boy who had lost his father —and Gelotti's voice faltered as he spoke of this egregious scamp—who from morning till night slaved to support his stricken mother, and through all the self-sacrificing days of his spotless boyhood never had suspicion or hint of sin come near him. The Court had heard how blithely and eagerly he had gone down to the *Palazzo a mare*—it was as

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well the Court had not heard his blithe remarks as he passed through the Piazza—on the afternoon of what should have been his holiday. What made him so gay? Gentlemen, the thought that inspired him was that by his service he might earn a franc or perhaps two francs, since it was a *festa*, to bring home to his aged parent. And what was his reward? Twopence, twopence followed by this base and unfounded and disproved and diabolical accusation. Prison had been his reward; he languished in a dungeon while all Alatri kept holiday and holy festival. As for the admission of which the prosecution had made so much, namely, that Luigi had said that the German gentleman had a hole in his pocket, how rejoiced was Lawyer Gelotti that he had done so. It was suggested that Luigi must have searched his clothes, and found there the apocryphal portfolio and the note that had no number. But it was true that Luigi was intimately acquainted with those voluminous trousers. But how and why and when? . . . And Lawyer Gelotti paused, while Luigi's friends held their breath, not having the slightest idea of the answer.

Lawyer Gelotti wiped his eyes and proceeded. This industrious saintly lad, the support of his mother's declining years, was hall-boy at the Grand Hotel. Numerous were the duties of a hall-boy, and Lawyer Gelotti would not detain them over the complete catalogue. He would only tell them that while others slept, while opulent German gentlemen dreamed about portfolios, the hall-boy was busy,

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helping his cousin, the valet of the first floor, to brush the clothes of those who so magnificently rewarded the services rendered them. Inside and outside were those clothes brushed: not a speck of dust remained when the supporter of his mother had done with them. They were turned inside and out, they were shaken, they were brushed again, they were neatly folded. In this way, gentlemen, and in no other came the knowledge of the hole in the pocket. . . .

Dio mio! Who spoke of fireworks?

* * * * * *

That evening Luigi came up to the villa to receive Francis's congratulations on his acquittal and departed through the garden. Next morning Francis, strolling about, came to the wall of the cistern, where Luigi's cache used to lurk behind the loosened masonry. The garden-bed just below it looked as if it had been lately disturbed, and with a vague idea in his mind he began digging with his stick in it. Very soon he came upon some shredded fragments of leather buried there. . . . I am rather afraid Francis is an accomplice.

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JUNE, 1914.

We have had a month of the perfect weather, days and nights of flawless and crystalline brightness, with the sun marching serene all day across the empty blue, and setting at evening unveiled by cloud or vapour into the sea, and a light wind pouring steadily as a stream from the north. But one morning there gathered a cloud on the southern horizon no bigger than a man's hand, which the weather-wise say betokens a change. On that day, too, there appeared in the paper that other cloud which presaged the wild tempest of blood and fire. Here in this secure siren isle we hardly gave a thought to it. We just had it hot at lunch and cold at dinner, and after that we thought of it no more. It seemed to have disappeared, even as the column of smoke above Vesuvius disappeared a few weeks ago.

It had been a very hot clear morning, and since, the evening before, it had been necessary to tell Pasqualino that the wages he received, the food he ate, and the room he occupied were not given him gratis by a beneficent Providence in order that he should have complete leisure to make himself smart and spend his whole time with his Caterina, he had been very busy sweeping and embellishing the house,

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while it was still scarcely light, in order to put into practice the fervency of his reformed intentions. He had come into my bedroom while dawn was yet grey, on tiptoe, in order not to awaken me, and taken away the step-ladder which he needed. As a matter of fact, I was already awake, and so his falling downstairs or throwing the step-ladder downstairs a moment afterwards with a crash that would have roused the dead did not annoy but only interested me, and I wondered what he wanted the step-ladder for, and whether it was much broken. Soon the sound of muffled hammering began from the dining-room below, which showed he was very busy, and the beaming face with which he called me half an hour later was further evidence of his delighted and approving conscience. It was clear that he could hardly refrain from telling me what he had been doing, but the desire to surprise and amaze me prevailed, and he went off again with a broad grin. Soon I came downstairs, and discovered that he had woven a great wreath of flowering myrtle, gay with bows of red riband, and had nailed it up over the door into the dining-room. A cataract of whitewash and plaster had been dislodged in the fixing of it, which he was then very busy sweeping up, and he radiantly told me that he had been on the hill-side at half-past four to gather materials for his decoration. Certainly it looked very pretty, and when the plaster and whitewash was cleared away, you could not tell that any damage had been done to the fabric of the house. Soon after Caterina came in with the week's

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washing balanced in a basket on her head, and Pasqualino took her through to show her his wreath. She highly approved, and he kissed her in the passage. I may remark that she is sixteen and he seventeen, so there is plenty of time for him to do a little work as domestic servant before he devotes himself to Caterina. Of all the young things in the island these two are far the fairest, and I have a great sympathy with Pasqualino when he neglects his work and goes strutting before Caterina. But I intend that he shall do his work all the same.

There is no such delicious hour in this sea-girt south as that of early morning ushering in a hot day. The air is full of a warm freshness. The vigour of sea and starlight has renewed it, and though for several weeks now no drop of rain has fallen, the earth has drunk and been refreshed by the invisible waters of the air. The stucco path that runs along the southern face of the house, still shadowed by the stone-pine glistened with heavy dews, and the morning-glory along the garden walls, drenched with moisture, was unfolding a new galaxy of wet crumpled blossoms. Yet in spite of the freshness of the early hour, there was a certain hint of oppression in the air, and strolling along the lower terrace, I saw the cloud of which I have spoken, already forming on the southern horizon. But it looked so small, so lost, in the vast dome of blue that surrounded it, that I scarcely gave it a second thought.

Presently afterwards Francis and I set out to walk down to the bathing-place. We stopped in the

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Piazza to order a cab to come down to the point where the road approaches nearest to the beach from which we bathed, for the midday walk up again would clearly be intolerable in the heat that was growing greater every moment, and set out through narrow ways between the vineyards, in order to avoid the dust of the high road. The light north wind, which for the past month had given vigour to the air, had altogether fallen, and not a breath disturbed the polished surface of the bay, where twenty miles away Naples and the hills above it were unwaveringly mirrored on the water. So clear was it that you could see individual houses there, so still that the hair-like stalks of the campanulas which frothed out of the crevices of the walls stood stiff and motionless, as if made of steel. Above us the terraced vineyards rose in tiers to the foot of the sheer cliffs of Monte Gennaro, fringed with yellow broom; below they stretched, in an unbroken staircase down to the roofs of the Marina, to which at midday comes the steamer from Naples carrying our post and a horde of tourists who daily, for the space of three or four hours, invade the place. Still downwards we went between vines and lemon orchards, and an occasional belt of olive-trees, till the bay opened before us again and the flight of steps that led to the enchanted beach of the *Palazzo a mare*.

Here on the edge of the sea the Emperor Tiberius built one of his seven island palaces, but in the course of centuries this northern shore has subsided, so that the great halls that once stood on the margin

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of the bay are partly submerged, and the waves wash up cubes of green and red marble from tesselated pavements that once formed the floors of the palace. Portions of the cliff-side are faced with the brick-work of its walls, from the fissures in which sprout spurge and tufts of valerian, and tumbled fragments of its foundations lie about on the beach and project into the water, in lumps twenty feet thick of compounded stone and mortar. The modern historian has been busy lately with Tiberius, devoting to his memory pailfuls of antiquarian whitewash, and here, where tradition says there lay the scene of infamous orgies, we are told now to reconstruct a sort of Sunday-school presided over by an aged and benevolent emperor, who, fatigued with affairs of state, found here an innocent and rural retreat, where he could forget his purple, and refresh himself with the beauties of Nature. Whatever the truth of that may be, there is no doubt that he built this palace in a most delectable place, and I sincerely hope that he was as happy in it as I am every morning among its ruins.

At one end of this little bay project huge masses of the palace walls, forming the promontory round which the fat and thwarted German swam, the day that he brought Luigi down to carry his clothes and his towels and his shoes. These latter were to enable him to cross the shingly beach, which, when the feet are unaccustomed to it, is undeniably painful. Along it, and by the edge of this tideless water, are pockets and streaks of grey sand, and to-day the

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sea lies as motionless as if it was the surface of some sheltered lake. Not a ripple disturbs it, not a breath of wind ruffles its surface. Standing knee-deep in it and looking down, you might think, but for a certain fullness and liquid clarity in the pebbles that lie at the bottom, that there was no water there at all, so closely does its translucence approach to invisibility. But it is impossible to stand dry-skinned there for long, so hotly does the sun strike on the shoulders, and soon I fall forward in it, and lie submerged there like a log, looking subaqueously at the bright diaper of pebbles, with a muffled thunder of waters in my ears, longing to have a hundred limbs in order to get fuller contact with this gladdest and loveliest of all the creatures of God.

But even in this hedonistic bathing one's ridiculous mind makes tasks for itself, and it has become an affair of duty with me to swim backwards and forwards twice to a certain rock that lies some three hundred yards away. There (for Luigi is not alone in this island in the matter of caches) I have what you may really call an emporium stowed away in a small seaweed-faced nook which I believe to be undiscoverable. If you know exactly where that nook is (it lies about two feet above the surface of the water), and put your hand through the seaweed at exactly the right spot, you will find a tin box containing (*i*) a box of matches, (*ii*) a handful of cigarettes, (*iii*) a thermometer. The first time that I arrive at the rock I have no truck with my cache, but only touch the rock with a finger, and swim

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back to the beach again. There I touch another rock with my finger (these two rocks, in fact, are like the creases at cricket, which you must touch with your bat in order to score a run), and swim back for the second time to my wicket out at sea. Then, oh then, after a cautious survey, in order to see that no one, not even Francis, can observe my movements, I take the tin box from its place, get out of the water on to the rock, and having dried my fingers on wisps of seaweed, light a cigarette and smoke it. As I smoke it, I submerge the thermometer in the sea, and when the cigarette is finished, read the temperature. After that the thermometer has to be dried, and is put back in the box with the cigarettes and matches, and the treasure is stowed away again in its seaweed-fronted cave. Once a fortnight or so I must go through a perilous manœuvre, for I have to bring the box back to be refilled. This entails swimming with one hand in the air holding the box like Excalibur above the sea, and it can only be done on very calm mornings, for otherwise there is danger of some ripples intruding through the hinges or edge of the lid, which does not shut very well. And all the time the risk of detection is imminent, for if Francis saw me swimming to land with a bright tin box in my hand, he would be certain to make inquires. But so far no such heart-breaking disaster has befallen, and without detection (and I humbly trust without suspicion) the cache-box has been twice taken back to be refilled and gone on its return journey again to its romantic

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hiding-place. Sometimes I have been within an ace of discovery, as when, to my horror, two days ago Francis swam out to my rock, instead of going to his own, while I was in the middle of my cigarette. I had time to put the box back, but somehow it never occurred to me to throw the cigarette away. By a special dispensation of Providence, however, it was not permitted that it should occur to him as odd that I should be seated on a rock in the middle of the sea, smoking. He was accustomed to the sight, I must suppose, of my smoking on land, and the question of locality did not occur to him. But it seemed a weary, weary time before he slid off into the sea again, I airily remarking that I should sit there a little longer. Sometimes, when Francis has been unusually communicative about private matters that concern himself alone, I wonder whether I ought to tell him about my cache. But I don't, for those who understand the true science of caches understand that if you have made a cache alone, you might just as well not have made it at all if you share your secret with anybody. You can have joint caches, of course. . . .

This morning the thermometer registered seventy-six degrees, which gave me a feeling of personal pride in the sea and Italy generally and I swam lazily back through the warm clinging water. The sun flamed overhead, and the line of the beach was reeling and dancing in the heat. But if you think that now my bathe was over, you are miserably mistaken;

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you might as well suppose that the play of *Hamlet* was finished when the ghost appeared. The swim to the rock is only the first act, the main bathe; and now begins the second or basking act, which may or may not be studious.

Some dozen bathers, English and American for the most part, are dotted about the beach. Francis is already out of the water, and is lying on his back in a pocket of sand, with his hands across his eyes to keep the glare out, and I take my volume of "The Ring and the Book," which I have made it my task to read through, put on a hat, and, wet and cool, sit down propped up against a smooth white rock. This is so hot that I must needs hang a towel over it, and then I open my book where I last turned down the page. For ten minutes perhaps I am a model of industry, and then insensibly my eye wanders from the dazzling white page where the words by some optical delusion seem printed in red. . . .

The sea is still a mirror of crystal; some little way out a big steamer, high in the water, so that the screw revolves in a smother of foam, is kicking her way into Naples, and soon the dark blue lines of her wash will come creaming to land. Otherwise nothing stirs; the sun-burned figures disposed about the beach might be asleep, and on the steep hillside behind there is no sound or movement of life. Perhaps a little draught draws downward towards the sea, for mixed with the aromatic smells of the dried seaweed on the beach there is a faint odour of the broom flower that flames on the slope. Already my

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book has slipped from my knee on to the pebbles and gradually—a phenomenon to which I am getting accustomed in these noonday baskings—thought fades also, and I am only conscious, though very vividly conscious; I know vividly, acutely, that this is Italy, that here is the sea and the baking beach, and the tumbled fragments of Tiberius's palace, that a dozen yards away Francis, having sat up, is clasping his knees with his arms, and is looking seaward; but all these things are not objects of thought, but only of consciousness. They seem part of me, or I of them; the welding of the world to me gets closer and more complete every moment; I am so nearly *the same thing* as the stones on the beach, and the liquid rim of the sea; so nearly too, am I Francis, or, indeed, any other of these quiet dreaming basking figures. The line of the steamer's wash which is now on the point of breaking along the shore is so nearly realizable as one with the sun or the sky, or me, or any visible or tangible part of the whole, for each is the expression of the Absolute. . . .

I do not know whether this is Paganism or Pantheism, or what, but that it is true seems beyond all power of doubt; it is certain, invariable, all that varies is our power of feeling it. To me personally the sense of home that Italy gives quickens my perception and assimilation of it, and this is further fulfilled by the intimacy with external things produced by these sun-soaked and sea-pickled mornings. Here in the south one gets closer to the simple facts of the world, one is welded to sun and sea; the com-

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munications between soul and body and the external world are cleaned and fortified. It is as if the buzz and clatter of a telephone suddenly cleared away, and the voice came through unhindered. In England the distraction and complications that necessarily crowd in on one in the land where one lives and earns one's living, and is responsible for a house and is making arrangements and fitting them into the hours of the day, choke the lines of communication; here I strip them off even as I strip off my clothes to wallow in the sea and lie in the sand. The barriers of individualism, in which are situated both the sense of identity, and the loneliness which the sense of *being oneself* brings, are drawn up like the sluices of a lock, letting the pour of external things, of sun and sea and human beings into the quiet sundered pool. I begin to realize with experience that I am part of the whole creation to which I belong.

You will find something of this consciousness in all that school of thought known as mysticism; it is, indeed, the basis of mysticism, whether that mysticism is pagan or Christian. In Greek thought you will find it, expressed guardedly and tentatively, and it undoubtedly lies at the base of some of their myths. It lurks in that myth of Narcissus, the youth who, beholding his own fair image in tranquil water, was drawn in by the spirits of the stream, and became a flower on the bank of the pool where he had lost himself, becoming merged in creation. So, too, in the story of Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved.

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Him, as he was playing with the discus, the sun-god inadvertently slew, and from his blood came up the flowers that bear his name. And more especially, for here we get not the instance only but the statement of the idea itself, we find it in the myth of Pan, the god of all Nature, the spirit of all that is. He was not to be found in town or market-place, nor where men congregate, but it might happen that the lonely wayfarer, as he passed through untenanted valley or over empty hill-side, might hear the sound of his magical fluting of the tune that has no beginning and no ending, for it is as young as spring and as old as Time. He might even see him seated in some vine-wreathed cave, and though the sight of him meant, even as to Narcissus or to Hyacinthus, the death of the body, who shall doubt that he to whom that vision was vouchsafed died because he had utterly fulfilled himself as an individual, and his passing was the bursting of his heart with the greatness of the joy that illuminated him? He had beheld Nature—Nature itself with true eyes, and could no longer exist in separate individual consciousness; seeing the spirit of the All, he knew and was merged in his union with it.

Here is the pagan view of the All-embracing, All-containing God, and it is hardly necessary to point out how completely it is parallel to, even identical with, the revelations of Christian mysticism. The bridal of the soul with her Lord, as known to St. Theresa, the dissolution and bathing of the soul in love, its forsaking of itself and going wholly from

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itself, which is the spirit of what Thomas à Kempis tells us of the true way, are all expressions of the same spiritual attainment. To them it came in the light of Christian revelation, but it was the same thing as the Greek was striving after in terms of Pan. And in every human soul is planted this seed of mystic knowledge, which grows fast or slow, according to the soil where it is set, and the cultivation it receives. To some the knowledge of it comes only in fitful faraway flashes; others live always in its light. And the consciousness of it may come in a hundred manners: to the worshipper when he receives the mystery of his faith at the altar, to the lover when he beholds his beloved, to the artist when the lift of cloud or the "clear shining after rain" suddenly smites him personally and intimately, so that for the moment he is no longer an observer but is part of what he sees.

But to none of us does the complete realization come until the time when our individuality, as known to us here and now, breaks like the folded flower from the sheath of the body. Often we seem nearly to get there; we feel that if only we could stay in a state of mind that is purely receptive and quiescent, the sense of it would come to us with complete comprehension. But as we get near it, some thought, like a buzzing fly, stirs in our brain, and with a jerk we are brought back to normal consciousness, with the feeling that some noise has brought us back from a dream that was infinitely more vivid and truer than the world we awake to.

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So it happened to me now. I saw and heard the hissing of the wash of the steamer break on the shore, observing it and thinking about it. I saw, too, that Francis had got up and was walking along towards me, ankle-deep in the shallow water. He groped among the pebbles with his hand, and picked something up. Then he came and lay down alongside, and before he spoke I think I knew the gist of what he was going to say.

He held out to me what he had picked up. It was one of those fragments of green mottled marble, such as we often find here, washed up from the ruined pavements of the palace.

"What is it?" he said. "What is it really? God somehow, you know."

"Or you or me?" I suggested.

"Yes, of course. Either, both. But there is something, Someone, call it the Absolute or the First Cause or God, which is quite everywhere. It can't be local. That's the only explanation of All-there-is which will hold water, and it holds water and everything else. But you don't get at it by discussion and arguments, or even by thought. You've got to open the windows and doors; let the air in. Perhaps you've got to knock down and blow up the very house of your identity, and sit on the ruins and wait. But it's the idea of that which makes me so busy in my lazy life."

The ripple of the steamer's wash died away again.

"Funny that you should have said that just now," I remarked.

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"Why? Just because you had been thinking about it? I don't see that. If the wind blew here, it would be odder that it didn't blow when I was sitting over there."

"But did you know I had been thinking about it?"

"Well, it seemed likely. Let's have another swim before we dress. There's trouble coming in the sky. It's the last of the serene days for the present."

"But there was a high barometer this morning."

"There won't be when we get up to the Villa again," he said. "The sun has got the central-heating touch to-day. It's been stuffy heat for the last hour, not the heat of the fire. And look at the sky."

Certainly a curious change had taken place all over the firmament. It was as if some celestial painter had put body-colour into what had been a wash of pure blue; there was a certain white opacity mingled with the previous clarity of it. The sun itself, too, was a little veiled, and its heat, as Francis had said, seemed more like the radiation from hot-water pipes than the genial glow of an open fire. Round it at a distance of three or four of its diameters ran a pale complete halo, as of mist. Yet what mist could live in such a burning and be unconsumed?

> "'Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
> And often is his gold complexion dimmed,'"

quoted Francis. "But here we have the two things occurring simultaneously, which Shakespeare did not

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mean. But what, after all, *didn't* Shakespeare mean?"

We swam out round the fat German's promontory, floated, drifting with the eastward setting current, came lazily in again, and even more lazily walked up through the narrow cobbled path to where the rickety little victoria was waiting for us on the road. The tourist boat had arrived, and clouds of dust hung in the air, where their vehicles had passed, undispersed by any breeze. The intolerable oppression of the air was increasing every moment; the horse felt himself unable to evolve even the semblance of a trot, and the driver, usually the smartest and most brisk of charioteers, sat huddled up on his box, without the energy to crack his whip or encourage his steed to a livelier pace. Usually he sits upright and sideways, with bits of local news for his passengers, and greetings for his friends on the road; to-day he had nothing beyond a grunt of salutation, and a shrug of the shoulders for the tip which he usually receives with a wave of his hat, and a white-toothed *"Tante grazie!"* The Piazza, usually a crowded cheerful sort of outdoor club at midday, was empty, but for a few exhausted individuals who sat in the strips of narrow shadow, and the post-office clerk just chucked our letters and papers at us. The approach of Scirocco, though as yet no wind stirred, made everyone cross and irritable, and set every nerve on edge, and from the kitchen, when we arrived at the Villa, we heard sounds of shrill altercation going on between Pasqualino and Sera-

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phina, a thing portentously unusual with those amicable souls. Pasqualino banged down the macaroni on the table, and spilt the wine and frowned and shrugged till Francis told him abruptly to mend his manners or let Seraphina serve us; on which for a moment the sunny Italian child looked out from the clouds and begged pardon, and said it was not he but the cursed Scirocco. And then, following on the cloud in the sky that had spread so quickly over the heavens, came the second cloud.

Francis had just opened the Italian paper which we had got at the post-office and gave one glance at it.

"Horrible thing!" he said. "The Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife have been murdered at Serajevo. Where is Serajevo? Pass the mustard, please."

Pasqualino's myrtle wreath fell down during lunch (he told us that it had done the same thing a good deal all morning), and he, exhausted by his early rising to pick it, and the increasing tension of Scirocco, went and lay down on the bench by the cistern in the garden as soon as his ministrations were over, and after the fashion of Italians took off his coat and put it over his head, which seemed odd on this broiling and airless day. From the kitchen came the choking reverberation of snores, and looking in, I saw Seraphina reposing augustly on the floor, with her back propped up against the kitchen dresser and her mouth wide, as if for presentation to a den-

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tist. Francis retired to his bedroom to lie down and sleep, and, feeling like Oenone that "I alone awake," I went to my sitting-room to read the paper, and, if possible, write a letter that ought to have been sent quite a week ago.

This room is furnished exactly as I chose to furnish it; consequently it has got exactly all that I want in it, and, what is even more important, it has nothing that I don't want. There is a vast table made of chestnut wood, so big that a week's arrears can accumulate on it, and yet leave space to write, to play picquet at the corner and to have tea. (If there are any other uses for a table, I don't know them.) This table stands so that the light from the window number one falls on it, and close behind it along the wall is the spring mattress of a bed. On it lies another thick comfortable mattress; above that a stamped linen coverlet, and on that are three enormous cushions and two little ones. The debilitated author, therefore, when the fatigue of composition grows to breaking-point, can thus slide from his chair at the enormous table, and dispose the cushions so as to ensure a little repose. Opposite this couch stands a bookcase, where are those few works that are necessary to salvation, such as "Wuthering Heights," "Emma," and "The Rubáiyát," books that you can open anywhere and be instantly wafted, as on a magic carpet, to familiar scenes that never lose the challenge of novelty (for this is the reason of a book, just as it is alsc of a friend). After the bookcase comes the door into my bed-

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room, and after that, on the wall at right angles, window number two, looking south. A chair is set against the wall just beyond it, and beyond again (coming back to window number one, which looks west) another chair, big, low and comfortable, convenient to which stands a small table, on which Pasqualino has placed a huge glass wine-flask, and has arranged in it the myrtle that was left over from his wreath. The walls of this abode of peace are whitewashed and ungarnished by pictures, the ceiling is vaulted, the tiled floor is uncarpeted, and outside window number one is a small terrace, on the walls of which stand pots of scarlet geraniums, where, when nights are too hot within, I drag a mattress, a pillow and a sheet. There are electric lamps on both tables and above the couch, and I know nothing that a mortal man can really want, which is not comprised in this brief catalogue.

I wrote the letter that should have been written a week ago, found that it didn't meet the case, and after tearing it up, lay down on the couch (completely conscious of my own duplicity of purpose) in order, so I said to myself, to think it over. But my mind was all abroad, and I thought of a hundred other things instead, of the bathe, of the garden, and wondered whether if I went into the studio and played the piano very softly, it would disturb anybody. Then I had the idea that there was someone in the studio, and found myself listening as to whether I heard steps there or not. Certainly I heard no steps, but the sense that there was some-

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one there was rather marked. Then, simultaneously I remembered how both Pasqualino and Seraphina had heard steps there, when the house was otherwise empty, and had gone there, both singly and together, to see if Francis or I had come in. But even as I did now, they have entered and found the studio empty. Often I have hoped that a ghost might lurk in those unexplained footfalls, but apparently the ghost cannot make itself more manifest than this.

I stood there a moment still feeling that there was somebody there, though I neither saw nor heard anything, and then went quietly along the passage, under the spur of the restlessness that some people experience before Scirocco bursts, and looked into Francis's room, the door of which was open. He lay on his bed in trousers and opened shirt, sleeping quietly. From here I could catch the sound of Seraphina's snoring, and from the window could see the head-muffled Pasqualino spread out in the shade of the awning above the garden cistern. And feeling more Oenone-ish than ever, I went back and lay down again. It was impossible in this stillness and stagnation of the oppressed air to do more than wait, as quiescently as possible, for the passing of the hours.

I was not in the least sleepy, but I had hardly lain down when the muddle and blur of sudden slumber began to steal over my brain. I thought I remembered seeing the murdered Archduke once in London, and was I wrong in recollecting that he

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always wore a fur-tippet over his mouth? I recognized that as nonsense, for I had never seen him at all, and fell to thinking about Francis lying there on his bed, with doors and windows open It seemed to me rather dangerous that he should lie there, relaxed and defenceless, for it was quite possible that Miss Machonochie, recognizing that everything was one (even as I had felt this morning on the beach) might easily prove to be Artemis, and coming in moon-wise through Francis's window might annex her Endymion. This seemed quite sensible . . . or Caterina might float into the garden in similar guise, and carry off Pasqualino . . . perhaps both of these love-disasters might happen, and then Seraphina and I alone would be left. . . . I should certainly swim away to my *cache*, and live on cigarettes and seaweed, and mercury from the thermometer. . . . I should have to break the bulb to get at it, and I thought that I was actually doing so.

It broke with a terrific crash, which completely awoke me. Another crash followed and a scream: it was the second shutter of my window that faced south being blown against the sash, and the scream was that of the pent-up wind that burst with the suddenness of lightning out of the sky. On the instant the house was full of noises, other shutters clattered and banged, my open door slammed to, as the Scirocco howled along the passage, as if making a raid to search the house. My pile of unanswered businesses rose like a snowdrift from the table, and were littered over the room; the wine

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flask and its myrtle overturned; a pot of geraniur on the edge of the terrace came crashing down. a moment the whole stagnation of the world w rent to ribands, and the ribands went flying on th wings of the wind. There was no doubt about foot steps now: Pasqualino came rushing in from th garden, Seraphina left her kitchen and bundled up stairs, and I collided with Francis as we ran int the studio to close the windows. Never have I known so surprising a pounce of the elemental forces of the world. A volcano bursting in flame and lava at one's feet, a war suddenly springing full-armed in a peaceful country, could not have shattered stillness with so unheralded an uproar.

Five minutes served to bolt and bar the southern and western aspects of the house from the quarter of the gale, and five more to repair the damage of its first assault. After that we listened with glee to its bellowing, and while Seraphina made tea, I went out of an eastern entrance to gain further acquaintance with this savage south-wester at first hand. It threw me back like a hot wave when I emerged from the sheltered side of the house into its full blast, but soon, leaning against it, I crept across the garden to the lower terrace. The olive-trees were bending to it, as if some savage, invisible fish had taken a bait they held out; twigs and branches were scurrying along the paths, and mixed with them were the petals and the buds of flowers that should have made July gay for us. A whirl of blue blossoms was squibbing off the tangle of

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orning-glory; even the red pillar-trunk of the one-pine groaned as the wind drove through its umbrella of dense foliage. The sun was quite hidden; only a pale discolourment in the sky showed where it travelled, and to the south the sea was already a sheet of whipped wave-tops under this Niagara of wind. It was impossible to stand there long, and soon I let myself be blown back up the garden and round the corner of the house into calm. Upstairs Francis was already at tea; he had picked up the sheet of the Italian paper which he had only glanced at during lunch.

"Serajevo appears to be in Servia," he said, "or Bosnia. One of those countries."

"Oh, the murder!" said I. "The garden's in an awful mess."

"I suppose so. Tea?"

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JULY, 1914.

For the last seven weeks not a drop of rain has fallen on the island. The great Scirocco of June brought none with it, and when that three days' hurricane was over, we returned to the wonderful calm weather that preceded it. Already nearly a month before the ordinary time the grape clusters are beginning to grow tight-skinned on the vines, and we expect an unprecedented vintage, for the Scirocco, though violent enough on the south of the island, did no damage to the northern slopes, where are the most of the vineyards. But the dearth of water is already becoming serious, for depending, as we do, on the cisterns where the rain is stored, it is full time that replenishment came to their ebbing surfaces. For the last fortnight, unable to spare water for other than household purposes, we have been obligeb to maroon the garden, so to speak, on a desert island, and already many householders are buying water for purposes of ablution and cooking. Indeed, when, last night, the sprightly Pasqualino announced that there was only half a metre of water left in the second cistern (the first one we improvidently emptied in order to clean it), and that the Signori would have to have their risotto and macaroni boiled in the

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wine-juice, of which there promised so remarkable a supply, Seraphina, who had come upstairs for orders, told him pretty roundly that if this was meant for a joke, it was in the worst possible taste, for it was she who ordered the wine, and was responsible for the lowness of the Signori's bills. Upon which Pasqualino sinuously retired with a deprecating smile, leaving Seraphina, flushed with victory, in possession of the field. . . . In fact the situation is so serious, she proceeded to tell us, that the priests have arranged that the silver image of San Costanzo is to-night to be taken in procession from the cathedral, where it usually abides, down to the Marina, where an altar is to be set up for him close to the quay, and fire-works to be let off, so that he may be gratified and by making intercession cause the rain we so sorely need to fall.

Certainly that seems a very sensible idea. The islanders adore fireworks and processions, and it is only reasonable of them to endow their saints with the same amiable tastes. San Costanzo, like all sensible folk, whether saints or sinners, delights in fireworks and processions, and of course he will be pleased to do his best after that. (As a matter of fact, though I hate cynicism, I cannot help remembering that the barometer has been falling these last three days, and I wonder whether the priests who have arranged this *festa* for San Costanzo know that. I hope not.)

Seraphina's informant on these matters was not the priest, anyhow, but Teresa of the cake shop.

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"And is Teresa then going down to the Marina?" I asked.

Seraphina threw open her hands and tossed back her head in emphatic denial. The Signor surely knew very well (or if he did not, Signorino Francesco did) that it was twelve years now since Teresa had gone down to the port, and never again would she set foot on that ill-omened quay. *La povera!* . . . And Seraphina stood in silence a moment, gravely shaking her head. Then she threw off the melancholy train of thought into which the mention of Teresa had led her.

"The meat comes from Naples to-morrow," she announced. "For dinner then a piece of roast meat and the fish that Nino has promised and a soup of vegetables. *Ecco!* And there will be no cooking in wine as that scamp said."

Afterwards Francis told me why Teresa of the cake shop never goes down to the Marina, though *festas* and fireworks beckon, and though San Costanzo's silver image is borne there in solemn procession, so that he may intercede for us, and cause to break up the brazen sky. It filled up in the telling the studious or basking stage of our bathe next morning.

"Fifteen years ago," he said, "when first I came to the enchanted island, Teresa Stali was the prettiest maid and the daintiest cook in all Alatri. That year I took for six months the Villa Bardi, which belonged to her father, who told me that if I was

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in need of a cook he could supply me with one of whom I should have no complaints. So, if I had not already got one, Teresa would do everything I needed—cook my food, look after the garden, and keep the house as bright as a Sunday brooch. Teresa, he explained, was his daughter, a good girl, and would I interview her. In answer to his loud cries of 'Teresa! Teresina!' taken up by shrill voices along the street, there came to the door a vision of tall black-haired maidenhood.

"'She is strong, too,' said her grinning parent, clapping her on the shoulder. 'Eh, the Signor should have seen her bump the heads of her two brothers together last week, when they threw stones at the washing she had hung up to dry. Bang! bang! they will not meddle with Teresina's washing again!'

"Of course I engaged this paragon, and never has a house been so resplendent, never were such meals offered for the refreshment of the esurient sons of men, as when Teresa was Prime Minister in the Villa Bardi. She was scarcely capable, it seemed, of walking, for her nimble feet broke into a run whenever more than a yard or two must be traversed; household work was a festival to her, and she sang as she emptied slops. Flowers, fresh every day, decked my table; you could have eaten off the floors, and each morning my shoes shone with speckless whitening. One thing alone had power to depress her, and that if by chance I went out to dine with friends, so that there was no oppor-

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tunity that evening for her kitchen-magic. The antidote was that on another day someone would dine with me, so that others beside her own signor should taste the perfect fruits of her oven.

"Often, when the table was cleared in the evening, and she came to get orders for next day before going back to her father's house for the night, she would stop and talk to me, for, in that she was in my household, she was of my family, identified with my interests and I with hers. By degrees I learned her domestic history, how there was a brother doing his military service, how there were two younger boys still at home, whom Satan continually inspired to unspeakable deeds (of which the stoning of her washing was among the milder); how her mother had taught her all she knew of cooking, how her father was the best carpenter in all South Italy, so that he had orders from Naples, from Salerno, from Rome even. And, finally, she told me about herself, how that she was engaged to Vincenzo Rhombo, of Santa Agatha, who had gone to Buenos Ayres to seek his fortune, and was finding it, too, with both hands. He had been gone for two years now, and last year he had sent her seven hundred francs to keep for him. Every year he was going to send her all he saved, and when he came home, Dio! . . .

"The post used to arrive about half-past eight in the morning, and was announced by sepulchral knocking on the garden door, on which Teresa, if she was brushing and tidying upstairs, flew down

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to take in the letters, duster in hand, or with whatever occupied her busy fingers at the moment. From there she rushed along the garden terrace to where I was breakfasting underneath the pergola, bringing me my letters. But one morning, I saw her take them in, and instead of coming to me, she sat down on the steps and remained there a long time, reading. Eventually I called to her.

"'Nothing for me, Teresa?' I asked.

"Instantly she sprang up.

"'Pardon—a thousand pardons,' she said. 'There are two letters, and a packet, a great packet.'

"'And you have had a packet?' I asked.

"'Jesu! Such a packet! May I show the Signor? Look, here is Vincenzo, his very self! And again seven hundred francs. Ah, it *is* Vincenzo! I can hear him laughing.'

"She laid the photograph before me, and, indeed, you could hear Vincenzo laughing. The merry handsome face was thrown back, with mouth half open.

"'And such news!' she said. 'He has done better than ever this year, and has bought a piece of land, or he would have sent even more money home. And at the end——' she turned over the sheets, 'at the end he writes in English, which he is learning. What does it mean, Signor?'

"This is what Vincenzo had written:

"'My corrospondence must now stopp, my Teresina, but never stopps my love for you. Across the sea come my kisses, O my Teresina, and from the

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Heart of your Vincenzo. I kiss my corrospondence, and I put it in the envelop.'

"I translated this and turned to the dim-eyed Teresina.

"'And that is better than all the money,' she said.

"Then she became suddenly conscious that she was carrying my trousers, which she was brushing when the knock of the postman came.

"'Dio! What a slut is Teresina!' she exclaimed. 'Scusi, Signor.'

"I went back to England at the termination of my lease of the Villa Bardi, for interviews with stormy uncles, and the settlement of many businesses, and it was some months later that I set off on my return here, with finality in my movements. On the way I had intended to stop half a week in Naples to take my last draught of European culture. But the sight of Alatri on the evening I arrived there, harp-shaped and swimming molten in a June sunset, proved too potent a magnet. Besides, there was reputed to be a great deal of cholera in Naples, and I have no use for cholera. So, early next morning I embarked at the Castello d' Ovo to come back to my beloved island.

"It was a morning made for such islanders as I: the heat was intense but lively, and the first thing to do on landing was to 'Mediterranizer' myself, as Nietzsche says, and bathe, wash off the stain of the mainland and of civilization, and be

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baptized, finally baptized, into this dreamland life. I often wonder whether dreams——"

"Stick to your story," said I. "It's about Teresa."

Francis shifted on his elbow.

"There was a bucketful of changes here," he said, "and I was disconcerted, because I expected to find everything exactly as I had left it. Alatri is the sleeping-beauty—isn't it true?—and the years pass, and you expect to see her exactly as she was in the nineties. But now they were talking of a funicular railway to connect the Marina with the town, and Giovanni the boatman had married, and they said his wife had already cured him of his habits. Oh, she brushed his hair for him, she did! And a damned American had started a lending library, and we were all going to enlarge our minds on a circulating system, and there was a bathing establishment planned, where on Sunday afternoon you could drink your sirop to the sound of a band, and see the sluts from Naples. But it fell into the sea all right, and the posts of it are covered with barnacles. Far more important it was that Teresa had opened a cake-shop in a superb position, as you know, close to the Piazza, so that when you come in from your walk you cannot help buying a cake: the force of its suggestion is irresistible. She opened it with good money, too, the money that Vincenzo had sent her back from Buenos Ayres. The cake-shop was now proceeding famously, and it was believed that Teresa was making twenty per cent. on her outlay, which is as much as you can hope

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to get with safety. But it had been—the cake-shop —a prodigious risk; for a month when the island was empty, it had not prospered, and Teresa's family distended their poor stomachs nightly with the cakes that were left unsold that day, for Teresa had high ideas, and would have nothing stale in her shop. She brought the unsold things home every night in a bag, for fresh every morning must be her cakes, and so the family ate the old ones and saved the money for their supper. Rich they were, many of them, and stuffed with cream.

"But after an anxious four weeks the *forestieri* began to arrive, and under their patronage, up went Teresa's cake-shop like a rocket. Customers increased and jostled; and Teresa, the daring, the audacious, took good luck on the wing, and started a tea-place on the balcony above the cake-shop, and bought four iron-legged, marble-topped tea-tables, and linen napkins, no less. She washed these incessantly, for her teaplace was always full, and Teresa would no more have dirty napkins than she would have stale cakes. That is Teresa!

"Business expanded. One of the two young brothers (whose heads she so soundingly knocked together) she now employed in the baking of her cakes, and for the other she bought, straight off, a suit of white drill with ten thousand bone buttons, and gave him employment in bringing the tea-trays up to the customers in the balcony. She paid them both good wages, but Satan, as usual, entered into their malicious heads and once in the height of the

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season they confabulated, and thought themselves indispensable, and struck for higher wages. Else they would no longer bake or hand the bakeries.

"A less supreme spirit than Teresa's might have given in, and raised their wages. Instead she hurried their departure, and no whit discouraged, she rose at four in the morning, and baked, and when afternoon came had all ready, and flew upstairs and downstairs, and never was there so good a tea as at Teresa's, nor so quickly served. In three days she had broken the fraternal strike, and the baffled brothers begged to be taken back. Then Teresa, who had been too busy to attend to them before, for she was doing their work in addition to her own, condescended to them, and told them what she really thought of them. She sat in a chair, did Teresa, and loosed her tongue. There was a blistering of paint that day on the balcony, though some said it was only the sun which had caused it. . . .

"Two sad-faced males returned to their work next day, at a stipend of five francs per month less than they had hitherto received. The island, which had watched the crisis with the intensest interest, loudly applauded her spirit, and told the discouraged but repentant labour-party that only a good-hearted sister would have taken them back at all. She had not even smacked them, which she was perfectly capable of doing, in spite of their increasing inches, but perhaps her tongue was even more stinging than the flat of her hand. Great was Teresa of the cake-shop!

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"All this I heard, and the best news of all remained to tell, for Vincenzo was even now on his way back from Buenos Ayres. He had made a tremendous hit with the land he had bought last summer, had money enough to pay off the mortgages on his father's farm at Santa Agatha, and he and Teresa would marry at once. Then, alas! Alatri would know Teresa no more, for she would live with her husband on the mainland. Already she had been made a very decent offer for the appurtenances and goodwill of the cake-shop, which, so she told me, she was secretly inclined to accept. But according to the proper ritual of bargaining, she had, of course, refused it, and told Giorgio Stofa that when he had a sensible proposition to make to her, he might call again. Giorgio, a mean man by all accounts, had been seen going to the bank that morning, and Teresa expected him to call again very soon.

"This conversation took place in the cake-shop while all the time she bustled about, now diving into the bake-house to stimulate the industry of Giovanni, now flying up to the balcony to see if Satan's other limb had put flowers on the marble-topped tables. Then, for a moment there was peace, and love looked out of Teresa's eyes.

" 'Eh, Signor,' she said. 'Vincenzo will be home, if God wills, by the day of Corpus Domini. What a *festa! Dio!* What a *festa* will that be!'

"The serene island days began to unroll themselves again, with long swimmings, long baskings

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on the beach, long siestas on grilling afternoons, when the whole island lay mute till the evening coolness began, and only the cicalas chirped in the oleanders. Then, as the heat of the day declined, I would often have tea on Teresa's balcony, and on one such afternoon the great news came, and Teresa put into my hand the telegram she had just received from Naples, which told her that Vincenzo's ship had arrived, and that her lover had come back. Business necessary to transact would detain him there for a day, and for another day he must be at Santa Agatha, but on the morning of Corpus Domini he would come to Alatri, by the steamer that arrived at noon. . . .

"'Six years since he went,' said Teresa. 'And oh, Signor, it is but as a day. We shall keep the *festa* together, and see the fireworks. . . . We shall go up into the rockets,' she cried in a sudden kindling of her tongue. 'We shall be golden rain, Vincenzo and I.'

"'And I shall stand below, oh, so far below,' said I, 'and clap my hands, and say "Eccoli!" That is, if I approve of Vincenzo.'

"Teresa put her hands together.

"'Eh! but will Vincenzo approve of me?' she said. 'Will he think I have grown old? Six years! Oh, a long time.'

"'It is to be hoped that Vincenzo will not be a pumpkin,' I remarked. 'Give me the large sort of cake, Teresa. I will carry it up to the Villa.'

"Teresa frowned.

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"'The cakes are a little heavy to-day,' she said. 'I had a careless hand. You had better take two small ones, and if you do not like them, you will send back the second. *Grazie tante, Signor.*'

"The news that Vincenzo was to arrive by the midday boat on Corpus Domini, spread through the town, and all Teresa's family and friends were down at the Marina to give him welcome. A heavy boat-load of visitors was expected, and the little pier was cleared of loungers, so that the disembarkation in small boats from the steamer might be unimpeded. But by special permission Teresa was given access to the landing-steps, so that she might be the first to meet her lover, even as he set foot on the shore, and there, bare-headed and twinkling with all her *festa* finery, she waited for him. In the first boat-load that put off from the steamer he came, standing in the prow, and waving to her, while she stood with clasped hands and her heart eager with love. He was the first to spring ashore, leaping across to the steps before the boat had come alongside, and with a great cry, jubiliant and young, he caught Teresa to him, and for a supreme moment they stood there, clasped in each other's arms. And then he seemed to fall from her and collapsed suddenly on the quay, and lay there writhing. . . . The cholera that was prevalent in Naples had him in his grip, and in two hours he was dead. . . ."

Francis sat silent a little after the end of his story.

"So now you know," he said, "why for fourteen

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years Teresa of the cake-shop has never gone down to the Marina."

* * * * * *

That night, when the thud and reverberation of the fireworks began down on the Marina, Francis and I went into the town to see them from above. The Piazza was deserted, for all Alatri had gone down to the port to take part in this procession and explosion in honour of San Costanzo, so that he might make intercession and send rain to the parched island, and we went out on to the broad paved platform which overlooks the Marina. This, too, seemed to be deserted, and perched on the railing that surrounds it, we watched the golden streaks of the ascending rockets, and their flowering into many-coloured fires. At this distance the reports reached the ear some seconds after their burstings; their plumes of flame had vanished before their echoes flapped in the cliffs of Monte Gennaro. The moon was not yet risen, and their splendour burned brilliantly against the dark background of the star-sown sky. By and by a whole sheaf of them went up together, and afterwards a detonating bomb showed that the exhibition was over. And then we saw that we were not alone, for in the dark at the far end of the railings a black figure was watching. She turned and came towards us, and I saw who it was.

"You have been looking at the fireworks, Teresa?" said Francis.

"*Sissignor.* They have been very good. San Cos-

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tanzo should send us rain after that. But who knows? It is God's will, after all."

"Surely. And how goes it?"

She smiled at him with that sweet patient face, out of which fourteen years ago all joy and fire died.

"The cake-shop?" she said. "Oh, it prospers. It always prospers. I am trying a new recipe to-morrow—a meringue."

"And you—you yourself?" he asked.

"I? I am always well. But often I am tired of waiting. *Pazienza!* Shall I send some of the new meringues up to the Villa if they turn out well, Signor?"

Francis had an inexplicable longing that evening to play chess, and as he despises the sort of chess I play with the same completeness as I despise parsnips, I left him with someone less contemptible at the café, and strolled up to the Villa again alone, going along the paved way that overlooks the sea to the south. High up was hung an amazing planet, and I felt rather glad I was no astronomer, and knew not which it was, for the noblest of names would have been unworthy of that celestial jewel. As if it had been a moon, the reflection of its splendour made a golden path across the sea, and posturing in its light, I found that it actually cast a vague shadow of me against a whitewashed wall. To the east the rim of the hill, where is situated the wireless station, was beginning to stand out very black against a dove-coloured sky, and before

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I had reached the steep steps that lead past the garden wall, the rim of the full moon had cut the hill-top, dimming the stars around it, and swiftly ascending, a golden bubble in the waters of the firmament, it had shot up clear of the horizon and refashioned the world again in ivory and black. All the gamut of colours was dipped anew; blues were translated into a velvety grey, so too were greens, and though the eye could see the difference, it was impossible to say what the difference was. Simply what we call blue by daylight became some kind of grey; what we call green a totally distinct kind of grey and blacker than the darkest shadow of the stone-pine was the shouting scarlet of the geraniums. No painter (pace the Whistlerians) has ever so faintly suggested the magic of moon-colouring, and small blame to him, since the tone of it cannot be rendered in pictures that are seen in the daylight. But if you take the picture of a sunny day, and look at it in moonlight, you will see, not a daylight picture, but a moonlight scene. The same thing holds with daylight scents and night-scents, and the fragrance of the verbena by the house wall was not only dimmer in quality, but different in tone. It was recognizable but different, ghost-like, disembodied without the smack of the sun in it.

I strolled about for a little, and then having (as usual) writing on hand that should have been done days before, I went reluctantly into the house. I was quite alone in it, for Seraphina had gone home, Pasqualino was down at the Marina taking part in

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fireworks and *festa,* and I had left Francis in a stuffy café pondering on gambits. We had dined early by reason of the fireworks, and before going up to my sitting-room to work, I foraged for cake and wine in the kitchen, and carried these upstairs. It was very hot, and I went first into the studio, where I set the windows wide, and next into Francis's room and Pasqualino's, where I did the same. Then I came back to my own room, exactly opposite the studio, and, stripped to shirt and trousers, with door and windows wide, I sat down for an hour's writing.

There is no such incentive to constructive thought as the knowledge that, humanly speaking, interruption is impossible. Seraphina would not return till morning, while *festa* and chess would undoubtedly detain Pasqualino and Francis for the next couple of hours. I had a luxurious sense of security; should I be so fortunate as to strike the vein I was delving for, I could go on mining there without let or hindrance. Reluctant though I had been to begin, I speedily found myself delightfully engrossed in what I was doing. Probably it did not amount to much, but the illusion in the author's mind, when he tinkers away at his tale, that he is doing something vastly important, is one that is never shaken, even though he continually finds out afterwards that the masterpiece has missed fire again. While he is engaged on his scribbling (given that his pen is in an interpreting frame of mind,

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and records without too many stumblings the dictation his brain gives it), he is in that Jerusalem that opens its gates of pearl only to the would-be artist, be he painter or poet or writer or sculptor. He is constructing, recording his impressions, and though (I hasten to repeat) they may be totally unworthy of record, he doesn't think so when he is engaged on them, for if he did, he would be conscious of external affairs, his mind would wander, and he would stop. Often, of course, that happens, but there are other blessed occasions when he is engulfed by his own imaginings, and absorbed in the reproduction of them.

It was so with me that night, when I sat quite alone in the silent house, knowing that none could disturb me for a couple of hours to come. Italy, even the fact that I was in Italy, vanished from my mind, and for the sake of the curious, at the risk of egoism, I may mention that I was with Mrs. Hancock in her bedroom in her horrid villa called Arundel, and looking over her jewels with her, to see what she could spare, without missing it, as a wedding present for her daughter. Engaged in that trivial pursuit, I lost conscious touch with everything else.

Quite suddenly a very ordinary noise, though as startling as the ringing of a telephone-bell at my elbow, where there was no telephone, snatched me away from my imaginings. There was a step in the studio just opposite, and I made no doubt that Francis had got home, had come upstairs without

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my hearing him, and no doubt thinking that I was at work, had passed into the studio. But then, looking at my watch, which lay on the table before me, I saw that it was still only half-past ten, and that I had been at work (and he at chess) for barely half an hour. But there was no reason that I should not go on working for an hour yet, and though my sense of security from interruption was gone, I anchored myself to my page again. But something had snapped; I could not get back into Mrs. Hancock's bedroom again, and after a few feeble sentences, and a corresponding number of impatient erasures, I came to a full stop.

I sat there for some ten minutes more, vainly endeavouring to concentrate again over Mrs. Hancock's jewels, but Francis's steps were in some way strangely disturbing. They passed up the studio, paused and returned, and paused and passed up again. Then, but not till then, there came into my mind the fact that Seraphina and Pasqualino had at different times heard (or thought they heard) footsteps in the studio, and on investigation had found it empty, and I began to wonder, still rather dimly and remotely, whether these were indeed the pacings of Francis up and down the room. My reasonable mind told me that they were, but the recollection of those other occasions became momently more vivid, and I got up to see.

The door of my room and that of the studio were exactly opposite each other, with the width of a narrow passage between them. Both doors were

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open, and on going into the passage I saw that the studio was dark within. It seemed odd that Francis should walk up and down, as he was still continuing to do, in the dark.

I suddenly felt an intense curiosity to know whether this was Francis walking up and down in the dark, or rather an intense desire to satisfy myself that it was not. The switch of the electric light was just inside the door, and even as my hand fumbled for it I still heard the steps quite close to me. Next moment the studio leaped into light as I pressed the switch, and I looked eagerly up and down it. There was no one there, though half a second before I had heard the footsteps quite close to me.

I stood there a moment, not conscious of fear, though I knew that for some reason my heart was creaking in my throat, and that I felt an odd prickly sensation on my head. But my paramount feeling was curiosity as to who or what it was that went walking here, my paramount consciousness that, though I could see no one, and the steps had ceased, there was someone close to me all the time, watching me not unkindly. But beyond doubt, for all visible presence, the studio was empty, and I knew that the search which I now carried out, visiting the darker corners, and going on to the balcony outside, from which there was no external communication further, was all in vain. Whatever it was that I, like Pasqualino and Seraphina, had heard, it was not a thing that hid itself. It was there,

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waiting for us to perceive it, waiting for the withdrawal of the shutter that separates the unseen world from the seen. The shutter had been partly withdrawn, for I had heard it; I had also the strong sense of its presence. But I had no conception as to what it was, except that I felt it was no evil or malignant thing.

I went back to my room, and, oddly enough, directly after so curious an experience, I found myself able to concentrate on Mrs. Hancock again without the slightest difficulty, and spent an absorbed hour. Then I heard the garden gate open, there were steps on the stairs, and a moment afterwards Francis came up. I told him what had happened, exactly as I have set it down. He asked a few slightly scornful questions, and then proceeded to tell me how he had lost his king's bishop. I could not ask scornful questions about that, but it seemed very careless of him.

The very next morning there turned up information which seems to my mind (a mind which Francis occasionally describes as credulous) to bear upon the watcher and walker in the studio, and it happened in this wise. Ten days before, the careful Seraphina had collected certain table-cloths, sheets and socks that needed darning, and with a view to having them thoroughly well done, and with, I make no doubt, another motive as well in her superstitious mind, had given the job to Donna Margherita, a very ancient lady, but nimble with her

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needle, to whom we are all very polite. Even Francis (though he has admirable manners with everybody) goes out of his way to be civil to Donna Margherita, and no one, who is at all prudent, will fail to give her a "Good day" if he passes her in the street. But if the wayfarer sees Donna Margherita coming in his direction, and thinks she has not yet seen him, he will, if he is prudent, turn round and walk in another direction. I have known Francis to do that on some paltry excuse (and he says I have a credulous mind!), but his real reason is that though he would not admit it, he is aware that Donna Margherita has the evil eye. Consequently we islanders must not vex her or be other than scrupulously civil to her, though we keep out of her way if we can, and when we must pass her it is wise to make the sign of the Cross surreptitiously. We do not talk about her much, for it is as well not to get near the confines of dangerous things; but before now Pasqualino has told me of various occurrences which to his mind put it beyond all doubt that Donna Margherita has the *jettatura*. There was the affair of his uncle's fig-tree: he had been foolish and said sharp things to her because her goat strayed into his vineyard. And Donna Margherita just looked at the fig-tree which grows by his gate, and said: "You have a fine fig-tree there; there will be plenty of fruit this summer." Within a fortnight all the crop of little half-ripe figs dropped off. There was her landlord who threatened to turn her out unless her quarter's overdue

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rent was paid the same evening. Was it paid? Not a bit of it; but the very same day the landlord's kitchen roof fell in. . . . There is no end to such evidence, and so when ten days ago Donna Margherita asked Seraphina if there was not any mending for her to do, it is no wonder (especially since she is so neat with her needle) that Seraphina gave her our lacerated linen.

Such is the history of Donna Margherita, and so when this morning, as we were breakfasting, her knock came at the garden door, and she entered, Francis jumped up, and called Seraphina from the kitchen to pay for the mending and give Donna Margherita a glass of wine on this hot morning. It was cool and shady under the pergola where we were breakfasting, and as the old lady had a fancy to sit down for a little after her walk, she came along and sat down with us. And, vying with each other in courtesies, Pasqualino brought her a slice of cake, and Seraphina a glass of wine, and then hastily retired from the dangerous neighbourhood, and looked out on the interview with troubled faces from an upper window.

To judge by her dried-apple cheek, and her gnarled and knotted hands, Donna Margherita might almost number the years with which Alatri credits her, asserting that she is a hundred summers old. Eighty, at any rate, she must be, since she has good recollection of the events of more than seventy years ago, and as she sipped her wine and

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clinked the soldi Seraphina (grossly overpaying) had given her, she talked amiably enough about our house and her early memories of it.

"Yes, it's a fine villa that the Signori have," she said; "but I can remember it as but a farm-house before additions were made to it. The farm buildings used to lean against it on the north, where later the big room was built by the English artist; byre and cow-house were there, and when I was a little girl a strange thing happened."

She mumbled her cake a little in her toothless jaws and proceeded:

"The farm in those days belonged to Giovanni Stofa, long since dead, and there he lived alone with his son, who is long dead also. One night after the house was shut up, and they sat together before going to bed, there came a noise and a clatter from the cow-house, very curious to hear. Giovanni thought that one of the cows had convulsions and ran out of the house and round by the kitchen, and into the shed where the two cows were stabled. And as he opened the door he was near knocked down, for both of them ran out with hoofs in the air and tails switching. Then, not knowing what should meet his eyes, he turned the lantern that he carried into the cow-house, and there standing in the middle was a *strega* (witch). But she looked at him not unkindly, and said: 'I have come to guard the house, and from henceforth I shall always guard it, walking up and down, ever walking up and down.'

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"The *strega* smiled at him as she spoke, and his knees ceased to tremble, for this was no black visitant.

"'Your cattle will not be frightened again,' she said. 'Look, even now they come back.'

"As she spoke, first one and then the other of the cows came into the stable again, and walked right up to where the *strega* stood, blowing hard through their nostrils. And next moment they lay down close to her, one on each side.

"'You will often hear me walking about here,' said the *strega;* 'but have no fear, for I guard the house.'

"And with that there came just one puff of wind, and Giovanni's lantern flickered, and lo! when the flame was steady again there was no *strega* there."

Donna Margherita took a sip of wine after her recitation.

"And does she still walk up and down where the cow-house was?" I asked.

"Surely; but fat ears cannot hear even the thunder," quoted Donna Margherita. "And now, Signori, I will be walking. And thanks for the soldi and the cake and the wine."

Francis got up too.

"You are active still, Donna Margherita," he said.

Donna Margherita stepped briskly down the path.

"Eh, yes, Signor," she said. "I am old but active;

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can still do such a day's work as would surprise you."

Francis's eye and mine met; we were behind her, so that she could not see the exchanged glance. What was in both our minds was the affair of Pasqualino's uncle's fig-tree, for that had certainly been a surprising day's work. But after she had gone, he alluded again to the steps I had heard in the studio in a far more respectful manner. The fact is, so I made bold to tell him, that he does not like Donna Margherita's unconscious innuendo that he has fat ears.

The hot, serene days pursued their relentless course without our experiencing any of the watery benefits we had hoped for from the treat of fireworks that we had given to San Costanzo, for immediately after that improvised *festa* the falling barometer retraced its downward steps, and the needle stood, steady as if it had been painted there, on the "V" of "Very Dry." Miss Machonochie's cistern, so she informed us, had barely a foot of water in it, and she came up to ask if she might borrow a few pailfuls from ours of a morning. "Borrow" was good, since naturally she could not pay it back till the rain came and replenished her store, and the moment the rain came it would be a foolish thing to go carrying pailfuls of water from one house to another when all were plentifully supplied. But she made a great point of putting down exactly how many pailfuls she borrowed, and also made a

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great point of coming to thank Francis every other afternoon about tea-time for his kindness. She did not care about thanking me, though I had been just as kind as Francis, and eventually, owing to the awful frequency of these visits, we posted Pasqualino on the balcony overlooking the path to give warning (like Brangäene from her tower) of Miss Machonochie's fell approach, while we had tea, so that we could effect an exit through the kitchen door, and live, like outlaws, in the heather, till Miss Machonochie had left her gratitude behind her. It was not sufficient to instruct Pasqualino to say we were out, for then Miss Machonochie would sit and rest in the garden for a little, or come up to the studio to write a letter of thanks (always to Francis). But with Pasqualino on the balcony, we can sit in peace over tea, till with a broad grin that occasionally explodes into laughter, he comes in to say that the Scotch Signorina's sunshade is a-bobbing up the path. Then we hastily scald ourselves with tea and go for a walk, for no longer in this dearth of water can the garden be refreshed, but must needs lie waterless till the rain revists us.

To-day we made an expedition up Monte Gennaro, the great crag that rises sheer from the south side of the island in two thousand feet of unscalable cliff. From the west the ascent is a mild, upward path over a stony hill-side, and the more delectable way is on its east side, where a very steep ascent burrows among thick growing scrub of laburnum and arbutus till it reaches the toppling

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precipices that frown above it. There, squeezing through interstices and fissures, it conducts to a huge grassy upland, unsuspected from below, that sweeps upward to the summit. A pine-tree or two stand sentinel here, but there is little anchorage of soil for trees, and for the most part the hill-side is clothed in long jungle grasses and spaces of sunny broom, the scent of which hangs sweet and heavy in the windless air. Here the dews are thicker, and the heat less intense, and though the rain has been so long withheld, the hillside is still green and unwithered, and deep among the grasses we saw abundance of the great orange-coloured lilies that we had come to gather. But that task was for the downward journey, and first we ascended to the peak itself. As we climbed, the island dwindled below us, and at last at the summit it had shrunk to a pin's-head in the girdle of the dim sea, domed with huge blue.

West, south and north, straight to the high horizon, stretched the untarnished and liquid plain; here and there, like some minute fly walking on a vast sheet of sapphire glass, moved an ocean-going steamer. Eastwards there floated, distant and dreamlike but curiously distinct, the shores and peaks of the mainland, and from it, on this side and that, there swam the rocks of the Siren isles, as if trying to join Alatri, the boldest swimmer of them all. The remoteness and tranquillity of mountain tops lay round us, and curious it was to think that down there, where Naples sparkled along the coast,

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there moved a crowd of insatiable ant-like folk, busy on infinitesimal things that absorbed and vexed and delighted them. Naples itself was so little; it was as if, in this great emptiness of sea and sky, some minute insect was seen, and one was told that that minute insect swarmed with other minute forms of life. To look at it was to look at a piece of coral, and remember that millions of animalculæ built up the structure that was but a bead in a necklace. And here, lying at ease on the grass, were just two more of the coral-insects that mattered so much to themselves and to each other. . . .

We slewed round again seawards, and looked over the precipitous southern cliffs. A little draught of wind blew up them, making the grasses at the rim shake and tremble. From below a hawk swooped upwards over the cliff edge, saw us, and fell away again with a rustle of reversed feathers into the air. Round the base of the cliffs the sapphire of the sea was trimmed with brilliant bottle-green, and not the faintest line of foam showed where it met the land. To the left on the island, the town of Alatri, with all its house-roofs and spires, looked as flat as on a map, and on the hill-side above it we could just make out the stone-pine cutting the white façade of the Villa Tiberiana. For a moment that anchored me to earth; but slipping my cable again, I spread myself abroad in the openness and the emptiness. Was I part of it, or it part of me? That did not matter much; we were certainly both

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part of something else, something of tumultuous energy that whirled the stars on their courses, and was yet the peace that passed understanding. . . .

The days had slipped away. Before the orange lilies, which we gathered that afternoon on Monte Gennaro, were withered, there remained to me but a week more for the present of island life, which flowed on hour by hour in the normal employments that made up the day. But all the small events, the sights and sounds, had to me then, as they have now, a curious distinctness, as when before a storm outlines of hills and houses are sharp and defined, and the details of the landscape are etched vividly in the metallic tenseness of the preceding calm. But, as far as I knew, there were in life generally no threats of approaching storm, no clouds that broke the serenity of the sky. Privately, my friendships and affairs were prosperous, and though by the papers it appeared that politicians were turning anxious eyes to Ireland, where ferment was brewing over Home Rule, I supposed, in the happy-go-lucky way in which the average English citizen goes whistling along, that those whose business it was to attend to such things would see to it. Personally, I intended to go back to England for a couple of months, and then return here for the warm golden autumn that often lasts into the early days of December. Established now, in this joint house, "*piccolo nido in vasto mar*," I meant to slide back often and for prolonged periods down the golden

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cord that has always bound me to Italy. But though these days were so soon to be renewed, I found myself clinging to each minute as it passed with a sense that they were numbered; that the sands were running out, and that close behind the serenity of the heavens there lurked the flare of some prodigious judgment. Yet, day by day there was nothing to warrant those ominous presages. I swam to my cache, smoked my cigarette, basked on the beach, and continued weaving the adventures of Mrs. Hancock. The same sense of instability, I found, beset Francis also, and this in spite of the fact that the beleaguerings of Miss Machonochie were suddenly and celestially put a stop to.

We had strolled down to the Piazza one evening after dinner, and mingled with the crowd that stood watching a great display of thunderstorm that was bursting over the mainland twenty miles away. Above us here was a perfectly clear sky, in which the full moon rode high, and by its light we could see that the whole of the coast was smothered in cloud, out of which broke ten times to the minute flashes of lightning, while the low, remote roar of the thunder, faintly echoed on the cliffs of Monte Gennaro, boomed without ceasing. Then we saw that long streamers of cloud were shooting out of that banked rampart towards us, and we had barely got back to the Villa again before the moon and the stars were obscured, and hot single drops of rain, large as a five-franc piece, steamed and vanished on the warm cement of the terrace.

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All night long the rain fell in sheets, and through the slats of the shutters I saw the incessant flashes, while the thunder roared and rattled overhead, and the pipe from the house-roof, that feeds our depleted cistern, gurgled and gulped and swallowed the rain it was thirsting for. Hour after hour the downpour continued, and when morning broke the garden-paths were riddled with water-courses, and the gathered waters gleamed in the cisterns, and Miss Machonochie need "borrow" no more, nor come up about tea-time to thank Francis for his largesse, and hound us from our tea to seek refuge on arid hill-sides. Pasqualino remarked that San Costanzo had been a long time thanking us for the fireworks; did I suppose that—— And as Pasqualino's remarks about the hierarchy of Heaven are sometimes almost embarrassingly child-like in their reasonableness, I skilfully changed the subject by telling him to measure the water in the cistern.

But though Francis need no longer be afraid of Miss Machonochie, "the arrow that flieth by day" so constantly transfixing him, and though after prolonged thought he confessed that there was nothing else in life which bothered him, except that in two years' time Pasqualino would have to go for his military service, and he himself would have to find another servant (which really seemed a trial, the fieriness of which need not be allowed to scorch so soon), he shares my sense of instability and uneasiness, and, like me, cannot in any way account for it. To encourage him and myself on the morning

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of my departure as we had our last bathe, I was noble enough to let him into the secret of my cache of cigarettes in the seaweed-hung recess in the rock, and together we lit the farewell incense to the *Palazzo a mare,* sitting on the rock.

"And there are two left," said I, "which we will smoke together here the first day that I come back."

"Is that a promise?" he said.

"Surely."

"And when will you keep it?"

"About the middle of September."

"And if you don't?" he asked.

"Well, it will only mean that I have been run over by a motor-car, or got cancer, or something of the sort, or that you have. If we are still in control of ourselves we'll do it. I wonder if those two cigarettes will be mouldy or pickled with brine by that time?"

"Kippered or mouldy or pickled, I will smoke one of them on the day you return," said he.

"And I the other. But I hope it won't be mouldy. Or I shall be sick," said I.

"Likely. Lord, what a pleasant thing it is to sit on a rock all wet in the blaze of the sun! I wonder if it's all too pleasant—whether Nemesis has her wooden eye on me? Oh, Mother Nemesis, beautiful, kind Lady Nemesis, remove your wooden eye from me! Your wooden eye offends me; pluck it out and cast it from thee! I don't do much harm; I sit in the sea and eat my food, and have a tremen-

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dous quantity of great ideas, none of which ever come to anything."

"You might be called lazy, you know," said I. "Lady Nemesis would explain that to you before she beat you."

"I might be called whatever you choose to call me," said he, "but it need not be applicable. I'm not lazy; my brain is an exceedingly busy one, though it doesn't devote itself to the orthodox pursuits of losing money in the city and labelling yourself a financier, or playing bridge in a country town and labelling yourself a soldier, or writing a lot of weary stories and calling yourself an author."

"I never did," said I hastily.

"Well, you permit other people to do so, if you will put on the cap like that. Don't rag, or I shall push you into the sea. I was saying that I was not lazy, because I think. Most people imagine that energy must be spent in action, and they will tell you quite erroneously (as you did just now) that if you don't sit in an office, or something of that kind, or do something, that you are indolent. The reason is that most people can't think, and so when they cease from acting they are unemployed. But people who can think are never so busy as when they cease from action. Most people are beavers; they build a dam, in which they shut up their souls. And they call it civilization. The world as pictured by such Progressionists will be an awful place. There will be wonderful drainage, and milk for children, and capsuled food, and inoculation against all

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diseases, and plenty of peace and comfort for everybody, and a chromolithograph of Mr. H. G. Wells on every wall. Then the millennium will come, the great vegetable millennium, in which the whole human race will stretch from world's end to world's end like rows of cabbages, each in his own place in straight lines, and all seated on the ground, as the hymn says. Why, the whole glory of the human race is that we're not content, not happy, missing something always, yearning for something that eludes us and glorifies our search. . . ."

He paused a moment, and drew the thermometer out of the water.

"It's an affair of conscience," he said; "I do what my conscience tells me is of most importance."

I felt rather sore at the fact that this afternoon I had to start on my northern career across Europe in a dusty train, with the knowledge that Francis would be here, still cool and clean, in the sea, while the smuts poured in on to the baked red velvet of my carriage, and that here he would remain, while I, dutiful and busy, saw the sooty skies of the town on the Thames, which seemed a most deplorable place of residence. Some of this soreness oozed into my words.

"Your conscience is very kind to you," I said. "It tells you that it is of the highest importance that you should live in this adorable island and spend your day exactly as you choose."

"But if it said I should go back to England, and sweep a crossing in—what's the name of that foul

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street with a paddock on one side of it?—Oh, yes, Piccadilly—sweep a crossing in Piccadilly, I should certainly go!" said he.

Unfortunately for purposes of argument, I knew that this was true.

"I know you would," I said, "but on the day of departure you must excuse my being jealous of such a well-ordered conscience. Oh, Francis, how bleak the white cliffs of our beloved England will look! Sometimes I really wish Heaven hadn't commanded, and that Britain had remained at the bottom of the azure main instead of arising from out of it. How I shall hate the solemn, self-sufficient faces of the English. English faces always look as if they knew they were right, and they generally are, which makes it worse. A quantity of them together are so dreadful, large and stupid and proper and rich and pompous, like rows of well-cooked hams. Italian faces are far nicer; they're a bed of pansies, all enjoying the sun and nodding to each other. I don't want to go to England! Oh, not to be in England now that July's here! I wish you would come, too. Take a holiday from being good, and doing what your conscience tells you, and spending your days exactly as you like. Come and eat beef and beer, and feel the jolly north-east wind and the rain and the mud and the fogs, and all those wonderful influences that make us English what we are!"

Francis laughed.

"It all sounds very tempting, very tempting indeed," he said. "But I shall resist. The fact is I

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believe I've ceased to be English. It's very shoc ing, for I suppose a lack of patriotism is one of t most serious lacks you can have. But I've got Even your sketch of England doesn't arouse an thrill in me. Imagine if war was possible betwee England and Italy. Where would my sympathic really be? I know quite well, but I shan't tell you.

The daily tourist steamer, the same that in a fev hours' time would take me away, came churning round the point, going to the Marina, where it would lie at anchor till four o'clock. It was obviously crammed with passengers—Germans, probably, for the most part, and the strains of the "Watch by the Rhine" played by the ship's band (cornet, violin and bombardon) came fatly across the water to us. Francis got up.

"Sorry, but it's time to swim back and dress," he said. "There's the steamer."

"There's the cart for Tyburn," said I mournfully.

So we put the tin box with the thermometer and the two cigarettes to be smoked on the rock one day in the middle of September, back in its curtained cave, and swam to land, lingering and lying on the sea and loath to go Then we dressed and walked through the dappled shade of the olive trees on the cobbled paths between the vineyards to where on the dusty road our carriage waited for us, and so up to the Villa.

I had but little to do in the way of packing, for with this house permanently ours and the certainty (in spite of qualms) of coming back in a couple of

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nths' time, I was making deposit of clothes here, d a few hours later I stood on the deck of the owded steamer and saw the pier, with Francis anding white and tall on the end of it, diminish nd diminish. The width of water between me and e enchanted island increased, and the foam of our ash grew longer, like a white riband endlessly laid ut on a table of sapphire blue. All round me were crowds of German tourists, gutturally exclaiming on he beauty of the island and the excellence of the beer. And soon the haze of hot summer weather began to weave its veil between us and Alatri: it grew dim and unsubstantial; the solidity of its capes and cliffs melted and lost its clarity of outline till it lay dream-like and vague, a harp-shaped shell of grey floating on the horizon to the west. Already, before we got to Naples, it seemed years ago that I sat on its beaches and swam in its seas with a friend called Francis.

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AUGUST, 1914.

Out of the serene stillness, and with the swiftness of the hurricane, the storm came up. It was in June that there appeared the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, when the heir to the Austrian throne was murdered at Serajevo. There it hung on the horizon, and none heeded, though in the womb of it lurked the seed of the most terrific tempest of blood and fire that the world has ever known. Suddenly in the last week of July that seed fructified, shooting out monstrous tendrils to East and West. A Note was sent from Vienna to Servia making demands, and insisting on terms that no State could possibly entertain, if it was henceforth to consider itself a free country. Servia appealed to Russia for protection, and Russia remonstrated with those who had framed or (more accurately) those who had sent that Note. The remonstrance fell on ears that had determined not to hear, and the throttling pressure of the inflexible hands was not abated. London and Paris appealed for a conference, for arbitration that might find a peaceful solution, for already all Europe saw that here was a firebrand that might set the world aflame. And then we began to see who it was that had caused it to be lit and flung, and who it was that stood over it now, forbidding any to quench it.

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Out of the gathering darkness there arose, like some overtopping genius, the figure of Germany, with face inexorable and flint-like, ready at last for *Der Tag*, for the dawning of which during the last forty years she had been making ready, with patient, unremitting toil, and hell in her heart. She was clad in the shining armour well known in the flamboyant utterances of her megalomaniac Nero, and her hand grasped the sword that she had already half-drawn from its scabbard. She but waited, as a watcher through the night waits for the morn that is imminent, for the event that her schemes had already made inevitable, and on the first sign of the mobilization of the Russian armies, demanded that that mobilization should cease. Long years she had waited, weaving her dream of world-wide conquest; now she was ready, and her edict went forth for the dawning of The Day, and, like Satan creating the world afresh, she thundered out: "Let there be night." Then she shut down her visor and unsheathed her sword.

She had chosen her moment well, and, ready for the hazard that should make her mistress of the world, or cause her to cease from among the nations, she paid no heed to Russia's invitation to a friendly conference. She wished to confer with none, and she would be friendly with none whom she had not first battered into submission, and ground into serfdom with her iron heel. On both her frontiers she was prepared; on the East her mobilization would be complete long before the Russian troops could be

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brought up, and gathering certain of her legions on that front, she pulled France into the conflict. For on the Western front she was ready, too; on the word she could discharge her troops in one bull-like rush through Belgium, and, holding the shattered and dispersed armies of France in check, turn to Russia again. Given that she had but those two foes to deal with, it seemed to her that in a few weeks she must be mistress of Europe, and prepared at high noon of *Der Tag* to attack the only country that really stood between her and world-wide dominion. She was not seeking a quarrel with England just yet, and she had strong hopes that, distracted by the imminence of civil war in Ireland, we should be unable to come to the help of our Allies until our Allies were past all help. Here she was staking on an uncertainty, for though she had copious information from her army of spies, who in embassy and consulate and city office had eaten the bread of England, and grasped every day the hands of English citizens, it could not be regarded as an absolute certainty that England would stand aside. But she had strong reasons to hope that she would.

It was on the first day of this month that Germany shut her visor down and declared war on Russia. Automatically, this would spread the flame of war over France, and next day it was known that Germany had asked leave to march her armies through Belgium, making it quite clear that whatever answer was given her, she would not hesitate to do it. Belgium refused permission, and appealed

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to England. On Monday, August 3rd, Germany was at war with France, and began to move her armies up to and across the Belgian frontier, violating the territory she had sworn to respect, and strewing the fragments of her torn-up honour behind her. Necessity, she averred, knew no law, and since it was vital for the success of her dream of world-conquest that her battalions should pass through Belgium, every other consideration ceased to exist for her. National honour, the claim, the certificate of a country's right to be reckoned among the civilizing powers of the world, must be sacrificed. She burned in the flame of the war she had kindled the patent of her rights to rank among civilized states.

It was exactly this, which meant nothing to her, that meant everything to us, and it upset the calculation on which Germany had based her action, namely, that England was too much distracted by internal conflict to interfere. There was a large party, represented in the Government, which held that the quarrel of Germany with France and Russia was none of our business, and that we were within our rights to stand aside. All that Monday the country waited to know what the decision of the Cabinet and of the House would be.

The suspense of those hours can never be pictured. It belongs to the nightmare side of life, where the very essence of the threatening horror lies in the fact that it is indefinite. But this I know, that to thousands of others, even as to myself, England, from being a vague idea in the background which we took for

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granted and did not trouble about, leaped into being as a mother, or a beloved personage, of whose flesh and bone we were, out of whose womb we had sprung. All my life, I am willing to confess I had not given her a thought, I had not even consciously conceived of her as a reality; she had been to me but like the heroine of some unreal sentimental tale, a thing to blush at if she was publicly spoken of. But on those days she, who had hitherto meant nothing to me, sprang to life, deep-bosomed, with patient hands and tender eyes, in which was no shadow of reproach for all those years of careless contempt. And by the curious irony of things, on the day that she was revealed to me, she stood in a place, from which, if she chose, she could withdraw herself into isolation, and from which, if she chose, she could step forth to meet the deadliest peril that had ever assailed her. But even in the moment of the first knowledge and love of her that had ever entered my soul, I prayed in a silent agony of anxiety that she should leave her sheltered isle for the unimaginable danger of the tempest that raged beyond the sea that was hers. For, indeed, if she did not, she was but a phantom of the pit; no mother of mine, but some unspeakable puppet, a thing to be hidden away in her shame and nakedness.

It was known that night that England would not tolerate the violation of Belgian soil, and had sent an ultimatum to Germany which would expire in twenty-four hours. And from the whole country there went up one intense sigh of relief that we were

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resolved to embark on what must be the most prodigious war that the world had ever seen. "Give War in our time, O Lord!" was the prayer of all who most truly knew that the only peace possible to us was a peace which would stamp the name of England with indelible infamy. And God heard their prayer, and on Wednesday we woke to a world where all was changed. The light-hearted, luxurious, unreflective days were gone, never probably in our time to return. Already the tempest of fire and blood was loosened in Europe; a line was drawn across the lives of everyone, and for the future there were but two periods in one's consciousness, the time before the war, and war-time.

It was during this week that I had a long letter from Francis written before the English ultimatum was known, but delayed in posts that were already scrutinized and censored. Though I had no friend in the world so intimate as he, his letter revealed him now as a person strangely remote, speaking an unintelligible language. So little a while ago I had spoken the same tongue as he; now all he said seemed to be gibberish, though his sentiments were just such as I might have expressed myself, if, since then, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday had not been among the days of my life.

"Things look black," he said, "and the papers, for once reflecting the mind of the people, are asking what Italy will do, if Germany and Austria go to war with France and Russia. I believe (and, remember, I speak entirely from the Italian point of

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view, for verily I have long ceased to be English) that it is frankly impossible that we should range ourselves side by side with Austria, our hereditary foe. It seems one of the things that can't happen; no ministry could remain in office that proposed that. And yet we are the ally of Austria and Germany, unless it is true, as the *Corriere* tells us, that the terms of our alliance only bind us to them in the event of aggression on the part of two nations of the Triple Entente. Be that as it may, I don't believe we can come in with Austria.

"I am extremely glad of it, for I am one of those queer creatures who do not believe that a quarrel between two countries can be justly settled by making a quantity of harmless young men on both sides shoot each other. I don't see that such a method of settling a dispute proves anything beyond showing which side has the better rifles, and has been better trained, unless you deliberately adopt the rule of life that 'Might is Right.' If you do let us be consistent, and I will waylay Caterina as she goes home with the money Seraphina has given her for the washing, rob, and, if necessary, murder her. If she proves to be stronger than me, she will scratch my face and bring her money safely home. And her father will try to shoot me next day, and I will try to shoot him. That's the logical outcome of Might is Right.

"I am glad, too, of this, that I myself am a denationalized individual, and if I have a motherland at all, it is this beloved stepmother-land, who for

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so long has treated me as one of her children. Damnable as I think war is, I think I could fight for her, if anyone slapped her beautiful face. And yet how could I fight against the country to whom we owe not only so much of the art and science, but of Thought itself? Germany taught mankind how to think.

"Let me know how things go in England. It looks as if you could keep out of this hurly-burly. So if Italy does too, I hope to see you here again in September. Seraphina suggests that Italy should make pretence of being friends with the *'bestia fedente,'* by which she means the Austrians, and that when they are fighting the Russians, she should run swiftly from them and seize the Trentino again. There seems much good sense in this, for 'the Trentino is ours, and it is right and proper to take what belongs to us.'

"England must be peculiarly beastly with all these disturbances going on. Why don't you pack up your tooth-brush and your comb and come back again at once? The *Palazzo a mare* is better than Piccadilly, and the purple figs are ripe, and the cones are dropping from the stone-pine, and never were there such fat kernels for Seraphina to fry in oil. Perhaps if you come back the *strega* would continue walking; she seems to have had no exercise since you were here. Your room is empty, and the door makes sorrowful faces at me as I go along the passage. It frowns at me, and says it isn't I it wants. And I share the silent verdict of your door.

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"I don't see what quarrel England can have with Germany, and it is unthinkable that Italy should go in with the Central Powers against the Triple Entente. Besides, how is England to fight Germany? It is the elephant and the whale. England hasn't got an army, has it? I can't remember anything connected with soldiers in England, except some sort of barracks with a small temple or chapel in front of it somewhere in St. James's Park. And I suppose the German fleet is only a sort of herring-boat compared to a liner, if it comes to ships. So really I don't see how the two countries could fight each other even if they wanted to.

"Even if you don't come now, you'll be certain to be back in September, won't you? Otherwise I shall think that there is some validity in presentiments, for you went away with a notion that it was not only for a month or two that you went. Better put an end to vain superstition by coming back before.

"Ever yours,

"FRANCIS."

"P.S.—Send a wire if you are coming. They say the posts are disorganized.

"Donna Margherita has had words with Miss Machonochie's cook. I'm sure I don't want any harm to come to Miss Machonochie or her household, but I think there must already be a leak in her cistern. That would be a good day's work for Donna Margherita, wouldn't it? Otherwise, when

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we all have plenty of water, why should Miss M. alone be wanting it?"

Reading this, I felt for a moment here and there that the events of this last week must have been a dream, so vividly did the island and the island life etch themselves on a page. For a half second I could smell the frying of the pine-kernels, could hear Pasqualino's quick step across the passage, as he entered from his Brangäene duty on the balcony to tell us that Miss Machonochie's foot was coming firmly up the steps. But the next moment the huge background of war was set up again, and all these things were strangely remote and dim. They had happened, perhaps, at least I seemed to remember them, but they no longer had any touch of reality about them, were of the quality of dreams. . . . The same unreality possessed Francis's suave surmises about the improbability of England's going to war with Germany, for the only thing that was actual was that she had done so. And not less unreal was the fact of Francis himself living the life that he and I also had lived before this cataclysm came. All that belonged to some prehistoric period which ceased something less than a week ago. Less than a week ago, too, I had been baptized and become a member of England, and already, so swiftly does the soul no less than the body adjust itself to changed conditions, the sense of having ever been otherwise, had vanished as completely as the aching

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of a tooth after the offender has been dealt with, and you can no longer imagine the pain it gave you.

But the letter was a difficult one to answer; I could not convey to him what had happened to me, any more than in this letter he could, except for a transient second, convey to me a realization of what had not happened to him. I began a dozen times: "I have just been to Trafalgar Square, and cannot picture to you the thrill that 'Rule, Britannia' "—— Clearly that would not do. I tried again with a jest to hide the seriousness of it: "What do they know of England who only Italy know?" I tried yet again: "Since seeing you something has happened that makes——"

And at that moment the cry of a newsvendor in the street made me rush out for the sixth time that afternoon to see what the latest information was. Liége still held out, it seemed, though it was rumoured that certain of its forts had fallen. But still the most gallant of the little States held up the Titanic invasion that was pouring down upon it, maintaining in the face of terrific pressure its protest and its resistance to the onrush of that infamous sea, in the depths of which German honour already lay drowned. How could any man fail to know what the sense of the native land, of patriotism meant, when he saw what a supreme meaning it actually did have? It is the fashion of cynics to say that mankind will suffer and deny themselves for the sake of some definite concrete thing, like money or a jewel or a picture, but never for an idea. Here

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was an instance that blew such cynicism to atoms. Already the soil of Belgium, its cities and its plains were lost, and its people knew it. But they fought, beaten and indomitable, just because it was an idea that inspired them—namely, the freedom of those who were already conquered (for none could doubt the outcome), the independence of the country which must soon for certain lay beneath the heel of Prussian murderers, who slew their children and violated their women, and could no more touch the spirit of the people than they could quench the light of the moon. Normally, perhaps, we more often feel the pull and the press of material things; but when there is heard in a man's soul the still small voice, which is greater than fire or earthquake, his true being wakes, and at the spiritual call, whether of religion or love or patriotism, he answers to an idea that far transcends all the beckonings of material sense. It is then that those we thought smug and comfort-smothered, bound in the bonds of peaceful prosperity, break from their earth-bound fetters and their sleep at the voice of the God which is immanent in them. There is no material profit to gain, but all to lose, and eagerly, like ballast that keeps them down, they cast everything else overboard, and sweep soaring into the untarnishable sunlight of their real being. For it is not only the stocks and stones of his native land that a man loves, any more than it is just the eyebrows and the throat of his mistress that he worships. He loves them because they are symbols and expression of her

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who inhabits them. They are the bodily tokens of the beloved spirit that dwells there. Under that inspiration the dumb lips prophesy, as the coal from the altar is laid on them, and their land becomes a temple filled, even in the darkness of their affliction, with the glory of the Lord. The terror by night and the arrow that flieth by day have no power to daunt them, for high above earthly things is set their house of defence.

There rose then from this quiet little land, sure and untroubled as the rising of the moon, a race of heroes. From further east, across the Rhine, there was another rising, the monstrous birth of a presence and a portent undreamed of. It towered into the sky, and soon at its breath the forts of Liége and of Namur crumbled and fell, and it passed on phallic and murderous over the corpses of slain children and violated mothers. Those who thought they knew Germany could not at first believe that this was the spirit and these the infamies of the land they loved. She who had stood for so much to them, she the mother of music, the cradle of sciences, the lover of all that was lovely, was changed as by the waving of a magician's rod into a monster of hell, oozing with the slime of the nethermost pit. Many could not credit the tales that flooded the press, and put them down to mere sensational news-mongering. But they were true, though they were not the whole truth; the half of it had not been told us. The race of musicians, scientists, artists, of chivalrous knights, still took as their motto: "The women and

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children first." But they played upon the words, and smiled to each other at the pun. Pleading the necessity that knows no law, they had torn up their treaty, avowing that it was but a scrap of paper, and dishonouring for ever the value of their word, now, like some maniac, they mutilated the law they had murdered. It may be that Germany was but the first victim of Prussian militarism, and Belgium the second; but Germany had sold its soul, and it kept its bargain with the power that had bought it.

While still Francis's letter remained unanswered on my desk, I received another from him, written several days later, which had made a quicker transit.

"This is all damnable," he said. "Of course we had to come in when Belgium was invaded. I skulked all day in the house while it was yet uncertain, for I simply dared not show an English face in the streets for shame. Thank God that's all right. I never thought I could have cared so much. They sang 'Rule, Britannia,' in the Piazza to-day, wonderfully vague and sketchy. You know what my singing is, but I tell you I joined. It was a strange thing to hear that tune in a country which was supposed to be allied with the nation on whom England has declared war, but there it was. They say that Italy has declared neutrality. You'll know by the time you get this whether that is so. By the way, if it is true that we are sending an Expeditionary Force to France, just send me a wire, will you? The papers are full of news one day which is con-

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tradicted the next, and one doesn't know what to believe about England's attitude and doings.

"There's no news on this dead-alive island. I feel frightfully cut off, and it's odd to feel cut off in the place where you've lived for so long. I began an article on the early French mystics last week, but I can't get on with it. Mind you send me a telegram.

"FRANCIS."

I sent the telegram saying that an Expeditionary Force to help the French to hold their frontier had already landed in France, and more men were being sent. Next morning I received a brief telegram in answer:

"Am starting for England to-day."

Liége fell, Namur fell, and like a torrent that has gathered strength and volume from being momentarily damned up, the stream of the invaders roared through France, and on her as well as on England descended the perils of their darkest and most hazardous hour. Sheer weight of metal drove the line of the Allies back and back, wavering and dinted but never broken. In England, but for the hysterical screams of a few journalists who spoke of the "scattered units" of a routed army making their way back singly or in small companies, the temper of the nation remained steadfast and unshaken, and in France, though daily the thunder of the invaders boomed ever nearer to Paris, nothing had power to

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shake the inflexible will of our ally. It mattered not that the seat of the Government must be transferred to Bordeaux, and thither they went; but the heart of France beat on without a tremor, waiting for the day which none doubted would come, when they turned and faced the advancing tide, breasted it, and set up the breakwater that stretched from the North Sea to the borders of Switzerland. Right across France was it established, through ruined homesteads and devastated valleys, and against it in vain did the steel billows beat.

Here I have a little anticipated events, for it was in the days while still the Germans swept unchecked across north-eastern France that Francis arrived, after a devious and difficult journey, that brought him on shipboard at Havre. He had no psychological account to give of the change that had occurred between his first letter and his telegram; he had simply been unable to do anything else than come.

"I know you like analysis," he said, "but really there is no analysis to give you. I was, so I found myself, suddenly sick with anxiety that England should come into the war (I think I wrote you that), and when your telegram came, saying we were sending a force abroad, I merely had to come home and see if there was anything for me to do. One has got to do something, you know, got to do something! Fancy my having been English all these years, and it's only coming out now, like getting measles when you're grown up."

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There was no need then to explain, and Francis, in his philosophical manner, tried to define what it was that had so moved him, and found, as so often happens when we attempt to fit words to a force that is completely unmaterial, that he could at first only mention a quantity of things that it was not. It was not that he felt the smallest affection for London, or Lincoln, or Leeds; he did not like Piccadilly any more than he had done before, or the mud, or the veiled atmosphere. Nor did he regard any of the inhabitants of our island with a greater warmth than previously. Besides myself, he had after his long absence abroad no one whom he could call a friend, and of the rest, the porter who had carried his luggage to the train at Southampton had not thanked him for a reasonable tip; the guard had been uncivil; the motor driver who brought him to my house was merely a fool. Indeed, whatever component part of the entity that made up England he considered, he found he disliked it, and yet the thought of all those disagreeable things as a whole had been enough to make him leave the siren isle, and come post-haste across the continent to get to that surly northern town, in which he had not set foot for a dozen years. And, being here, he did not regret, as an impulsive and ill-considered step, his exile from Alatri. There was no fault to be found with that; it had been as imperative as the physical needs of thirst and hunger. He got up, gesticulating, in Italian fashion.

"Where does it come from?" he said. "What is

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it that called me? Is it something from without? Is it a mixture, a chemical soul-mixture of the grumpy porter and the grey sea, and this dismal, half-lit afternoon that is considered a lovely day in London? Or is it from within, some instinct bred from fifty generations of English blood, that just sat quiet in me and only waited till it was wanted? I hate doing things without knowing the reason why I do them. I always said 'Why?' when I was a child, and I only don't say 'Why?' now, because if I want to know something, I sit and think about it instead of asking other people. But all the way here I've been considering it, and I can't see why I had to come back. I don't think it's only something internal. There's a magnet outside that suddenly turned its poles to us, and instantly we jumped to it like iron filings and stuck there. There's no shirking it. There I was in Italy, saying to myself that I wasn't an iron filing, and should stop exactly where I was. But the magnet didn't care. It just turned towards me, and I jumped. It will keep me attached, I suppose, as long as there's any use for me."

He was feeling his way gropingly but unerringly down into himself, and I listened as this, the simplest of men, but that deft surgeon of minds, cut and dissected down into his own.

"The magnet, the magnet!" he said. "I think that the magnet is something that lies behind mere patriotism. Patriotism perhaps is the steel of which it is made; it is the material through which the force

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is sent, the channel of its outpouring, but . . . but it isn't only to put myself at the disposal of England in my infinitesimal manner that I have come back. England is the steel of the magnet—yes, just that; but England isn't the force that magnetizes it."

He dropped down on the hearth-rug, and lay there with the back of his hands over his eyes, as he so often lay on the beach at the *Palazzo a mare*.

"I haven't wasted all those years at Alatri," he said, "when I was gardening and mooning about and looking at the sea. I have come to realize what I remember saying to you once, when I picked up a bit of green stone on the beach, that it was you or me and God. To do that I had got to get out of myself. . . . We collect a hard shell round ourselves like mussels or oysters, and we speak of it as 'ours.' It's just that which we are bound to get rid of, if we are to see things in any way truly. We talk of 'having' things; that's the illusion we suffer from. We can't enter into our real kingdom till we quite get rid of the sense that anything is ours, thus abdicating from the kingdom we falsely believed to be our own. That's the glorious and perfect paradox of mysticism. We have everything the moment we get rid of ourselves, and the sense that we have anything. You can express it in a hundred ways: the lover expresses it when he says: 'Oh, my beloved, I am you!' Christ expresses it when He says: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' As long as you cling

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to anything, you can't get at your soul, in which is God.

"Patriotism, standing by the honour of your country when your country is staking itself on a principle, seems to me a materialization of this force, the steel through which it can act. Well, when you believe in a principle, as I do, you've got to live up to your belief in it, and suffer any amount of personal inconvenience. You mustn't heed that, or else you are not getting outside yourself. So if England wants a limb or an eye, or anything else, why, it's hers, not mine."

He was silent a moment.

"And perhaps there's another thing, another drama, another war going on," he said. "Do you remember some fable in Plato, where Socrates says that all that happens here upon earth is but a reflection, an adumbration of the Real? Is it possible, do you think, that in the sphere of the eternal some great conflict is waging, and Michael and his angels are fighting against the dragon? Plato is so often right, you know. He says that is why beauty affects the soul, because the soul is reminded of the true beauty, which it saw once, and will see again. Why else should we love beauty, you know?"

He got up with a laugh.

"But it's puzzling work is talking, as Mr. Tulliver said. However, there's my guess at the answer of the riddle, as to why I came home. And it really is such a relief to me to find that I didn't cling to what I had. I was always afraid that I might,

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when it came to the point. But it wasn't the slightest effort to give it up, all that secure quiet life; the effort would have been not to give it up. I don't in the least want to be shot, or taken prisoner, or brutally maimed, but if any of those things are going to happen to me, I shan't quarrel with them."

"And when the war is over?" I asked.

"Why, naturally, I shall go back to Alatri by the earliest possible train and continue thinking. That's what I'm alive for, except when it's necessary to act my creed, instead of spelling out more of it. I say, may we have dinner before long? This beastly bracing English air makes me very hungry."

Francis refused all thought of getting a commission, since it seemed to him that this was not doing the thing properly, and enlisted next day as a private. For myself, since circumstances over which I had no control prevented my doing anything of the sort, I found work connected with the war which to some extent was a palliative of the sense of uselessness. It was quite dull, very regular, and entailed writing an immense quantity of letters.

And at this point I propose to pass over a whole year in which the grim relentless business went on. Like wrestlers, the opposing armies on the Western Front were locked in a deadly grip, each unable to advance, each refusing to give ground. On the east Russia advanced and was swept back again; in the Balkans, owing to our inept diplomacy Turkey and Bulgaria joined the enemy. During the spring

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Italy abandoned her neutrality and joined the Allies. Expeditions were sent out to Mesopotamia and the Dardanelles. For a year the war flamed, and the smoke of its burning overshadowed the earth.

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SEPTEMBER 1915.

I do not suppose that there is any literal truth in that remarkable piece of natural history which tells us that eels get used to being skinned. It may have been invented by those who like eating that execrable worm, or, more probably, it is a proverbial simile which is meant to convey a most unquestionable truth, namely, that however unpleasant a thing may be, in time we get adjusted to it. It would be an ill thing for the human race if they did not, and argues no callousness on their part. It is simply one of Nature's arrangements, an example of the recuperative power which enables us to throw off colds, and mends the skin when we have cut ourselves shaving. If every wound, physical and moral alike, remained raw, the race could not continue, but would speedily expire from loss of blood and gangrene. And if in process of time we did not rally from staggering blows, we should all of us, at an early age lie prone on our backs, squealing, till death mercifully put an end to our troubles. But all our lives we are receiving wounds and blows, and we recuperate. Only once during this mortal existence do we fail to recover, more or less, from things that at first seemed intolerable, and then we die.

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This invariable rule applies to the position in which we find ourselves after thirteen months of war. Most of us have suffered intimate losses; there is scarcely a man or woman in England whom death has not robbed of some friend or relation. But we are not as a nation bewildered and all abroad, as we were thirteen months ago. We do not wake every morning with the sense that after the oblivion of the night we are roused to a nightmare existence. We have somehow adjusted ourselves to what is happening, and this adjustment argues no callousness or insensibility; it is just the result of the natural process by virtue of which we are enabled to continue living. Also, the need that Francis felt when he said, "One must do something," has come to the aid of those who in general, before the days of the war, never did anything particular beyond amusing themselves. This really implied that other people had got to amuse them by giving them dinner-parties and concerts and what not, and since these had no time to attend to them now, a remarkably large percentage of the drones, finding that nobody was providing for them, set to work for once in their lives, and slaved away at funds or hospitals or soup-kitchens, and found that to do something for other people was not half so tedious as they had supposed before they gave it a trial. This was a very salutary piece of natural adjustment, and they all felt much the better for it. A certain number of confirmed drones I suppose there will

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always be, but certainly London has become a much more industrious hive than it ever used to be.

Another process has contributed to the recuperative process, for the details of life have been much simplified. When your income is ruthlessly cut down, as has happened to most of us, it is clear that something must be done. The first thing we all did, naturally, was to raise a wild chorus of asserting that we were ruined. But when these minor strains did not seem to mend matters much, most people, under the recuperative force, began to consider and make catalogues of all the things which they could quite well do without. It is astonishing how voluminous these catalogues were. Those who had footmen who went to the war, like proper young men, suddenly found out that there were such things as parlour-maids. Those who rolled about in motor-cars discovered that there were taxicabs, and it was even hinted in more advanced circles that 'buses plied upon the London streets and tubes underneath them. There was some vague element of sport about it: it was something new to lie in ambush at a street corner and pounce on No. 19 that went up Sloane Street and along Shaftesbury Avenue, or get hopelessly befogged in the stupefying rabbit warrens that are excavated below Piccadilly Circus.

In spite, then, of the huge tragedies, the cruel bereavements, the distress among those whose economies were in no way a game, but a grinding necessity, we have adjusted ourselves, and are alive to the amazing fact that the day of little things, the small

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ordinary caresses and pleasures of life, is not over. For a while it was utterly darkened, the sun stood in full-orbed eclipse, but now (not callously) we can take pleasure in our little amusements and *festas* and fusses, though, owing to more useful occupations, we have not so much time for them. To compare a small affair with these great ones, I remember how a few years ago I suddenly had to face a serious operation. The moment at which I was told this was one of black horror. There the doctor sat opposite me, looking prosperous and comfortable, and said: "You must make up your mind to it; have it done at once." Being a profound physical coward, the thing seemed quite unfaceable, an impossibility. But before an hour was up, the adjustment had come, and once more the savour of the world stole back. The sun that day was just as warm as it had ever been, food was good, the faces of friends were dear, and the night before it was to take place I slept well, and when finally I was told it was time to go along the passage to where the operation was to be done, I remember turning down the page of the book I was reading and wondering less what was going to happen to me than to the characters of the novel. Nothing, in fact, is unfaceable when you have to face it; nothing entirely robs the eye and the ear of its little accustomed pleasures.

But what is much more important than the fact that the little things of life have put forth their buds again is that as a nation our eyes, half closed in dreamy contentment, have been opened to the

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day of great things. The outbreak of war in August last year was an earthquake inconceivable and overwhelming; but it has become one of the things that is, an austere majestic fact. Among its débris and scarred surfaces, not only has the mantle of growth with which Nature always clothes her upheavals begun to spring up, but the smoke of its ruin, like the cloud of ash over Vesuvius, has soared into high places, and its deepest shadows are lit with splendours that irradiate and transfigure them. It is not of terror alone that tragedy is compounded; there is pity in it as well, the pity that enlightens and purges, the unsealing of the human heart. God knows what still lies in the womb of the future, but already there has come to us a certain steadfastness that lay dormant, waiting for the trumpet to awaken it. We are, it is to be hoped, a little simpler, a little more serious, a little busier over doing obvious duties, a little less set on amusements and extravagancies. And I do not think we are the worse for that. The faith in which we entered the war, that ours was a righteous quarrel, has proved itself unshakable; the need to stand firm has knitted the nation together.

Of our necessities, our failures, our endeavours and our rewards in these great matters, it is not possible to speak, for they are among the sacred things that dwell in silence. But there are, you may say, certain condiments in life which can be spoken of. First and foremost among them is a sense of humour, which has been extremely useful.

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Without losing sight of the main issue, or wanting to forget the tragic gravity of it all, it would be ridiculous to behave like pessimists and pacifists, and with distorted faces of gloom and pain, to shudder at the notion of finding anything to smile at. Even while we are aghast at the profanity with which the German Emperor regards himself as a Moses of the New Dispensation, and steps down from the thunderclouds of Sinai with the tables that have been personally entrusted to him, on the strength of which he orders his submarines to torpedo peaceful merchant vessels, we cannot (or should not) help smiling at this Imperial buffoon. Or why waste a shudder on his idiot son, when a smile would not be wasted, since it would do us good? Surely there are bright spots in the blackness. Or again, though hate is a most hellish emotion, and it is, of course, dreadful to think of one white nation being taught to hate another, yet when people compose a hymn of hate for the English, words and music, and have it printed and sold at a loss all over the German Empire in order to root more firmly yet the invincible resolve of the Teuton to strafe England, is it reasonable not to feel cheered up by the ludicrousness of these proceedings? Certainly it is a pity to hate anybody; but, given that, may we not treasure tenderly this crowning instance of the thoroughness of the frightful German race? I am glad they did that; it does me good. When I think of that, my food, as Walt Whitman says, nourishes me more. I like to think of Prince Oscar

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sending a telegram to his father, saying that he has had the overpowering happiness to be wounded for the sake of the Fatherland. I am glad his father sent for a Press agent and had those precious words published in every paper in the Fatherland, and I trust that Prince Oscar, since he likes being wounded so much, will get well quickly and go back and be wounded again. I am pleased that when Russia was sending hundreds of thousands of troops through England to join the Western battle-line, the fact was put beyond a doubt by somebody's game-keeper seeing bearded men getting out of a train at Swindon on a hot day and stamping the snow from their boots, which proved they had come from Archangel. . . . It all helps. Queen Elizabeth was a wise woman when she said that we have need of mirth in England. God knows we have.

I have been a year in London, hardly stirring from it by reason of things to do; but a fortnight ago I escaped into Norfolk for a breathing-space of air and sea. It was a good sea, in the manner of northern seas, and though it was impossible not to contrast it with the hot beach and lucid waters of the *Palazzo a mare,* I would not have exchanged it for that delectable spot. High, sheer sand-cliffs lined the coast, and on their edges were dug trenches with parapets of sandbags, while here and there, where the cliffs were broken away, there were lines of barbed wire entanglements. These, I must hope, were only, so to speak, practice efforts, for I found it saved time, when going down to bathe early, to

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step through these, with an eye to pyjama legs, rather than walk an extra hundred yards to a gap in those coast defences. But it all gave one a sense that this was England, alert and at war, and the sea itself aided the realization. For there every day would pass cruisers or torpedo-boats, no longer in peaceful manœuvres, but engaged, swift and watchful, on their real business. Sometimes one would be running parallel with the coast, and then turn and roar seawards, till only a track of smoke on the horizon marked its passage. But that was the real thing; the armour of England was buckled on; it was no longer just being polished and made ready. The whole coast was patrolled, and all was part of one organized plan of defence, and when the moment came, of offence; somewhere out there the Grand Fleet waited, as it had waited more than a year; these ships that passed and went seaward again were the sentries that walked round the forts of the ocean.

A week on the coast was followed by a few days at a country house inland before I returned to London, and once again the realization of war had a vivid moment. The house where I was staying was surrounded by pheasant covers that came close up to the garden, where one night after dinner I was straying with a friend. It was warm and still; the odour of the night-blooming stocks hung on the air; the sky was windless and slightly overclouded, so that the stars burned as if through frosted glass, and we were in the dark of the moon. Then suddenly

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from the sleeping woods arose an inexplicable clamour of pheasant's cries; the place was more resonant with them than at the hour when they retired to roost. Every moment fresh crowings were added to the tumult. I have never heard so strange an alarum. It did not die down again, but went on and on. Then presently through it, faintly at first, but with growing distinctness, came a birring rhythmical beat, heavy and sonorous. It came beyond doubt from the air, not from the land, and was far more solid, more heavy in tone, than any aeroplanes I had ever heard. Then my friend pointed. "Look!" he said. There, a little to the east, a black shape, long and cylindrical, sped across the greyness of the shrouded sky, moving very rapidly westward. Soon it was over our heads; before long it had passed into indistinctness again. But long after its beat had become inaudible to our ears, the screams of the pheasants continued, as they yelled at the murderer on the way to the scene of his crime.

For half an hour after that some stir of uneasiness went on in the woods; the furred and feathered creatures were aware, by some sixth sense, that there was danger in the air. Then muffled and distant came the noise of explosions and the uneasiness of the woodland grew to panic again, with rustlings in the brushwood of hares seeking cover, and the cries of birds seeking each other, and asking what was this terror by night. Presently afterwards the beat of the propellers was again audible to human ears, and the Zeppelin passed over us once more, flying

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invisible at a great height, going eastwards again. It was moving much faster now, for its deadly work was over, and, flushed with its triumph, it was bearing home the news of its glorious exploit. Those intrepid crusaders, Lohengrins of the air, had taken their toll of smashed cottages, slain children and murdered mothers, and the anointed of the Lord next morning, hearing of their great valour above a small Norfolk hamlet, would congratulate them on their glorious exploit and decorate them with iron crosses to mark his shameful approval of their deed.

London at night has become a dim Joseph's coat of many colours. The authorities are experimenting in broken rainbows for the sake of our safety from above, and for our vastly increased peril on the ground. Instead of the great white flame of electric lights, and the hot orange of the gas, we have a hundred hues of veiled colour. What exactly all the decrees are which produce these rainbows, I do not know; but the effect, particularly on a wet night when the colours are reflected on wet wood pavements and asphalte, is perfectly charming, and we hope that, in compensation for the multiplied dangers of the streets, we shall be immune from the flames and fumes of incendiary and asphyxiating shells. The prudent householder—I am afraid I am not one—has had a good deal of pleasant occupation in fitting up his cellar as a place to flee unto when we are threatened with Zeppelins, and one night, shortly after my return, I had the pleasure of in-

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specting one of these. It lay deep in the bowels of the earth, and if the absence of air would not asphyxiate you, I am sure its refugees need fear no other cause of suffocation. There were several deck-chairs, and at a slightly withdrawn distance a serviceable wooden form on which the servants would sit, while the bombardment was going on, in a respectful row. There was a spirit-lamp on which to make tea, a tin of highly nutritious biscuits, and a variety of books to read by the light of electric torches. Upstairs the same thoroughness prevailed. Nightly, on retiring to bed, the lady of the house had on a table close at hand a bag containing the most valuable of her jewellery, and a becoming dressing-gown much padded. Her husband's Zeppelin suit, the sort of suit you might expect to find in opulent Esquimaux houses, lay on another chair, and outside in the hall was a large washing basin filled with some kind of soda-solution, and on the rim of it, hung like glasses on the top of a punch-bowl, were arranged half a dozen amazing masks, goggle-eyed and cotton-wooled, which, on the first sign of an asphyxiating bomb, would be dipped in the solution of soda and tied over the face. To provide against incendiary bombs there was a pail of sand and a pail of water at every corner, while below the cellar beckoned a welcome in case of explosions. Given a moment for preparation, this house was a fortress against which Zeppelins might furiously rage together without hurting anybody. Whether they sought to suffocate or to burn, or to blow to

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atoms, this thoughtful householder was prepared for any of their nasty tricks.

All this was perfectly entrancing to my flippant mind, and after dinner, when the servants had washed up, we had, at my particular request, a rehearsal of the Zeppelin game to see how it all worked. The servants and my host and hostess retired to their respective bedrooms, and we put out all the lights. As guest, I had no duty assigned to me, I was just going to be a passenger in the Ark of safety, so I remained in the hall. When I judged I had given them enough time to lie fairly down on their beds, I sounded the gong with great vigour, which denoted that a Zeppelin had begun dropping bombs in the neighbourhood. Then the house responded splendidly: in an incredibly short space of time my hostess came out of her room, with the bag containing the regalia in her hand, and her beautiful padded dressing-gown on; my host came from his with the Esquimaux suit over his dress-clothes—looking precisely like Tweedledum arrayed for battle—and the servants, with shrill giggles, waited near the basin of soda-solution. Then we all put on masks (there was one to spare, which was given me), and, omitting the ceremony of dipping them in the soda, my host caught up the basin, and we all trooped downstairs into the cellar. The servants plumped themselves down on the bench, we sat in the deck-chairs, and there we all were. The time from the sounding of the gong to the moment when the cellar door was banged, and we were safe from

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explosives and asphyxiating bombs, was just three minutes and five seconds. The only thing unprovided for was the event of the Zeppelin dropping incendiary bombs after we had all gone into the Ark, for in that case the house would be burned above us, and we should be slowly roasted. But that cruel contingency we settled to disregard. It would be the kind of bad luck against which it is hopeless to take precautions. So then, as it was a hot evening, my host took off his Zeppelin suit again, and after testing the nutritive biscuits, which were quite delicious, we went upstairs again with shouts of laughter. No doubt their provision had a solid base of reason, for it certainly would be very annoying to be asphyxiated in your room, when such simple arrangements as these would have resulted in your having a cup of tea in the comfortable cellar instead; but there was this added bonus of sport about it all. It was the greatest fun.

This house where I had been dining was in the neighbourhood of Bedford Square, and I left about half-past ten, with the intention of walking as far as Charing Cross, and there embarking on the underground. I had hardly gone a hundred yards from the house, when on to the quiet night there came a report so appalling that it seemed like some catastrophic noise heard in a dream. It was quite close to me, somewhere on the left, and I ran as hard as I could round the corner of a block of houses to be able to look eastwards, for there was no doubt in my mind that a Zeppelin, nearly overhead, had dropped

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a bomb. Before I got to the corner there was another report as loud as the first, and, looking up, I saw that the searchlights, like pencils of light, were madly scribbling about over the sky. Suddenly one caught the Zeppelin, then another, and next moment it was in the meeting focus of half a dozen of them, hanging high above my head, serene and gilded with the rays of light, a fairy creation of the air. Then began the sound of guns, one shell exploded in front of it, another far below it. Disregarding all the regulations for their protection, people ran out of their houses, and, like me, stood gaping up at it, for the excitement of it was irresistible. I noticed that one man near me put up the collar of his coat whenever there was a loud explosion, just as if a slight shower was falling, and then quite gravely and seriously put it down again. Others stepped into porches, or flattened themselves against the walls, but none did as they were told by the police regulations. A special constable was there too, who should have herded us all into cover; instead, he stared with the rest, and put the lighted end of his cigarette into his mouth. For, indeed, this was not a thing you could see every day, a Zeppelin hanging above you, and the shells from guns in London exploding round it. It fired the imagination; here was the Real Thing, which we had been reading about for a year and never seen. The air had been invaded by the enemy, and guns in the heart of the securest city in the world were belching shells at it.

Then came the end of this amazing sight: a shell

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burst close to that serene swimmer, and it stuck its nose in the air, and ascending with extraordinary speed, like a bubble going upwards through water, got out of the focus of searchlights and disappeared.

By this time the eastern horizon was glowing with a light that grew steadily more vivid. The airship had dropped incendiary bombs in the City, and fire-engines were racing along Oxford Street, with gleam of helmets, clanging of bells and hoarse shouts from the firemen. But there was no getting near the seat of the fire, for a cordon of police had closed all streets near it, and I walked homewards along the Embankment, with eyes fixed on the sky, and cannoning into other passengers, because I did not look where I was going, as you may see ladies doing when they gaze in a hypnotized manner into hat-shops, as they walk along the street.

Apart from the actual thrill of the adventure, there was a most interesting psychological point, which I considered as I went homewards. There were we, the crowd in the street, just average folk, just average cowards in the face of danger, and not one, as far as I could see, gave a single thought to the risk of dropped bombs or falling pieces of shrapnel. We might any or all of us be wiped out next moment, but we didn't care, not in the least because we were brave, but because the interest of what was happening utterly extinguished any other feeling. Probably the majority of the crowd had passed gloomy and uncomfortable moments imagining that very situation, namely, of having a murderous

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Zeppelin just above them; but when once the murderous Zeppelin was there, they all forgot it was murderous, and were merely interested in the real live Zeppelin. Just in the same way, in minute matters, we all find that ringing the dentist's bell is about the worst part of the tiresome business.

The sequel as concerns the house in which I had dined so few hours before delighted me when I was told it next day. I suppose the realistic character of our rehearsal preyed on the servants' minds, for they groped their way downstairs to the cellar in the dark, and none thought to turn on the electric light. My hostess picked up her jewel-case and groped her way after them, forgetting about the soda-solution and the masks, and my host threw open the window and gazed ecstatically at the Zeppelin till it vanished. Then he turned on the lights and fetched his household back from the cellar, since the raid was over. . . . It is but another instance of how, when faced with a situation, we diverge from the lines of conduct we have so carefully laid down for ourselves. I once knew a family that practised fire-drill very industriously in case that one day there might be an outbreak in the house. There were patent extinguishers to put it out with, and ropes to let yourself out of window all over the place, and everyone knew exactly what he was to do. Then the opportunity so long expected came, and a serious outbreak occurred. On which the owner forgot everything that he had learned himself and taught everybody else, and after throwing a quan-

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tity of his valuable Oriental china on to the stone terrace, he performed prodigies of single-handed valour in saving a very old piano which nobody wanted at all. . . . (I think this pathetic story contradicts my theory about the calmness of the crowd on the Zeppelin night, but who wants to be consistent?)

I had arrived this September at a break in the lease of my house, and six months before (see page two of the lease in question) I had given notice to the owner in writing that I should evacuate. Consequently for the last few months I had been an assiduous frequenter of house-agents' offices, and the God of addition sums alone knows how many houses I had seen over from garret to basement. The extraordinary thing about all these was that they were all exceptional bargains, such as the agent had never before known, and that in almost every case another gentleman was in negotiation for them. In spite of that, however, if I chose at once and firmly to offer the price asked, there was a strong probability of my securing one of these marvellous bargains, and thwarting the ambitions of the other gentleman. This opportunity to thwart the other gentleman was certainly an appeal to the more villainous side of human nature, and often, if a house seemed to me the sort of habitation I was on the look-out for, the thought of the other gentleman getting it was an incentive to take it myself. But never before did I realize how hopelessly traditional

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is that section of the human race which designs our houses for us. The type, in the modest species of abode I was looking for, never varied. There was a narrow passage inside the front door, with a dining-room and a back room opening out of it, and a staircase up to the first floor, where lay two sitting-rooms, invariably knocked into one. There was a bath on a half-landing, there were front bedrooms and back bedrooms higher up, all exactly alike, and for a long time I looked in vain for any house that was not precisely like any other house. In fact, this became a *sine qua non* with me, and ceasing to care whether I thwarted the other gentleman or not, I think if I had found a house where the bath-room was in the basement, or there was no staircase, so that you had to go upstairs in a basket with a rope, I should have taken it. I almost despaired of finding what I wanted, and thought of revoking, if possible, my notice of quitting, for in my present house there is something which is not quite like other houses, for some inspired tenant threw down the wall between the dining-room and the entrance passage, making a sort of hall of it, in the middle of which I dine. That there are inconveniences attaching to it I don't deny, for the guest sitting nearest the front door occasionally jumps out of his skin when the postman thunders with the evening post close by his ear; but the house isn't quite like other houses of its type, which is precisely the reason why ten years ago I took it.

With a pocket full of "orders to view," and

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plenty of shillings for the patient caretakers who mournfully conducted me over their charge, I used on most days to set out on these explorations after lunch, returning discouraged at tea-time. I could not see myself in any of the houses I saw, or imagine going to sleep in any of those front bedrooms, or spending the evening in the back-room behind the dining-room, or in the two sitting-rooms knocked into one. But then, though it lingered long, came the Mecca of my quest. Even at the front door I had some premonition of success, for the knocker was not like other knockers, and when the door opened, I saw, with a beating heart, that the staircase was not like other staircases. Some four feet from the ground it turned at right angles towards where the dreadful little back room should be. It couldn't go into the door of the little back room, or if it did, it would be very odd. You would have to pass through the dining-room in order to get to the bottom of the staircase. . . . Then advancing I saw: the staircase turned into a little hall (originally, no doubt, the dreadful little back room). Beyond lay a broad passage, and the dining-room was built out at the end. Through the open door of it I saw the windows looking out, not on to a street at all, but on to full-foliaged trees that grew in a disused graveyard. Between it and the house ran a way for foot-passengers only. Something in my brain exulted, crying out "This is it!" and simultaneously I felt a soft stroking on my shin. Looking down I saw a grave black cat rubbing against me.

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Was there ever such an omen? I had already settled in my mind that this must be the house intended for me (it was), and here was the bringer of good luck congratulating me on my discovery.

I made the usual grand tour, but in how different a mood, and as I mounted my spirits rose ever higher. In front was a square (so-called though it was an oblong) closed at the top end where my house was situated, so that no traffic came through it, and at the back was this big graveyard, with its church, and the dome of the Brompton Oratory (concealment is useless) rising over its shoulder like the Salute at Venice. Literally not a house was in sight; there was but the faintest sound of traffic from the Brompton Road; I might have been a country parson in his vicarage. I went straight to the house-agent's, made an offer, and didn't care one atom whether I thwarted anybody or not. Naturally I hoped I did, but it made no difference.

A little genteel chaffering ensued, for I felt so certain that I was going to live in that house, that I felt I was running no risks, and in a week it was mine, with possession at this quarter-day of September. Then having got my desire, I began to feel regretful about the house I was leaving. I had spent ten jolly years in it, and now for the first time I became aware how I had taken root there, how our tendrils, those of the house and of me, had got intertwined. The roots consisted of all kinds of memories, some sad, some pleasant, some ludicrous, but all dear. I was digging myself up like a plant, and

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these fibres had to be disentangled, for I could not bear to break them. For though memories are immaterial things, they knit themselves into rooms or gardens, the scenes where they were laid, and those scenes become part of them and they of those scenes. Just as a house where some deed of horror has been done retains for sensitives some impression of it, and we say the house is haunted, so even for those who are not sensitives in this psychical sense the rooms they have lived in, where there has been the talk and laughter of those they have loved, and maybe lost, have got knit into them, and must be treated tenderly if parting comes. And I imagined, when I came home after definitely settling to leave this month, that the house knew about it, and looked at me with silent reproach. For we had suited each other very well, we had been very friendly and happy together, and now I was deserting the home in the making of which we had both been ingredients, and the spirit of the house I was betraying was full of mute appeal. It did not want to be left alone, or, still worse, to be mated with people who did not suit it. But what could I do? I was going away; there was no doubt about that, and I could hardly give it a present of fresh paint or paper some of its rooms to please it. That would have been ridiculous. But I would leave it all the bulbs I had planted year by year in the garden. There would be a great show of them next spring. . . . Poor dear little old house!

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I had got possession of my new house "as from" (this is legal phraseology, and means "on") the first of September, when the front door-key was given me; and thus I had four weeks for decoration, and took a header into the delightful sea of paints and papers and distempers. The most altruistic of friends, whom I will call Kino (which has something to do with his name but not much), vowed himself to me for the whole of that month, to give advice in the matter of colours, and not to mind if I rejected it, to come backwards and forwards for ever and ever from one house to the other, with a pencil, a memorandum-book and a yard measure incessantly in his pocket. For when you go into a new house you have to measure all that you possess to see if it fits. It never does, but you can't help believing it is going to. You have to measure curtains and curtain rods to see where they will go (the idea of leaving a lovely brass curtain rod behind was an idea before which my happiness shrivelled like a parched scroll); you have to measure brass stair-rods and count them; you have to measure blinds, and carpets and rugs and grand pianos and beds and tables and cupboards. Then with the dimensions written down in Kino's memorandum-book, we hurried across to the new house, and measured the heights of rooms by tying the tape on to the end of a walking-stick, and the spaces between the eyelets on stairs which in favourable circumstances retain the carpet rods in place, the widths of recesses, comparing them with the measurements of the articles we

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hoped to establish there. Also with sinkings of the heart I surreptitiously took the size of an awkward angle of the staircase (up which my grand piano must pass), and came to the conclusion that it wouldn't. I said nothing about it to Kino, because it is no use to anticipate trouble. But later in the day, when we were back in Oakley Street again, I came unexpectedly into the drawing-room and caught *him* measuring the piano. Of course I pretended not to see.

The previous tenant of the new house had taken away most of the fixtures, but was willing to leave certain degraded blinds, which on my side I did not want. On the other hand, I had not long ago got a quantity of new blinds for my old house, which I should have liked to use if possible, and the question of blinds became a nightmare. I had before now deplored the awful uniformity of architects in matters of building; now I raged over their amazing irregularities with regard to windows. In an insane anxiety for originality, they seemed to make every window of a different size; my drawing-room blinds were three inches too narrow for my new drawing-room, and two inches too broad for the front bedroom. Then Kino would have a marvellous inspiration, and, running downstairs, discovered that the hall window was of precisely the same width as the drawing-room windows in the old house, so that a home was found for one of the blinds. So he measured all the other windows in the new house, to find a home for the other drawing-room blind.

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Then we lost the measurements of the windows in my old bedroom, and I went back to Oakley Street, to measure these again and telephone the dimensions to him. On going to the telephone "the intermittent buzzing sound" awaited me, and after agitating discussions between me and the exchange, I found that Kino was simultaneously ringing me up to say he had found the list in question, and by a wonderful stroke of good luck my bedroom blinds fitted the back bedroom on the second floor. There was only one window there, so we had left over (at present) one drawing-room blind and one bedroom blind. . . . That night I dreamed that Kino was dead, and that I, as undertaker, was trying to fit a bedroom blind on to him as a shroud; but his feet, shod in Wellington boots, protruded, and I cut a piece off the dining-room blind to cover them up.

But through all these disturbances the work of painting and distempering went swiftly on, and the house began to gleam with the colours I loved. For a mottled wall-paper in the hall and passage which resembled brawn that had seen its best days, there shone a blue in which there met the dark velvet of the starry sky and the flare of the Italian noon. Black woodwork with panels of white framed the window, and of black and white was the staircase; a yellow ceiling made sunshine in the dining-room. The drawing-room was fawn-grey, and on the black floor would gleam the sober sunsets of Bokhara; even blinds that would not fit and brass curtain-rods that there was no use for had, so to speak, a silver

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lining. Marvellous to relate, there seemed every prospect of the work being finished by the twenty-ninth of the month, and with an optimism pathetically misplaced, I supposed that it was the simplest thing in the world to put the furniture of a small house into a larger one. I knew exactly where everything was to go; what could be simpler than with a smiling face to indicate to the workmen the position of each article as it emerged from the van? It is true that the thought of the grand piano still occasionally croaked raven-like in my mind, but I pretended, like Romeo, that it was only the nightingale.

I suppose everybody, however lightly enchained to possessions, has some few objects of art (or otherwise) to which he is profoundly attached. In my case there were certain wreaths and festoons of gilded wood-carving by Kent, and before the actual move took place, Kino and I had a halcyon day in fixing these up to the walls of the blue hall, where they would be safe from the danger of having wardrobes and other trifles dumped down on them. So on a certain Sunday we set off from Oakley Street in a taxicab piled high with these treasures and with hammer and nails, and with a bottle of wine, sandwiches of toast and chicken, apples and two kitchen chairs. Disembarking with care, we ate the first meal in the house, and did not neglect a most important ceremony, that of making friends with the Penates, or gods of the home, who, like my *strega* in Alatri and the fairies of *Midsummer Night's*

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Dream, police the passages when all are asleep and drive far from the house all doubtful presences. There on the earth we made burnt offering of the crumbs of chicken sandwiches and apple-rind, building an oven of the paper in which our lunch was wrapped, and at the end pouring on the ashes a libation from the bottle of wine. All was right that day; the nails went smoothly home into the walls, we did not hammer our fingers, and the gold wreaths arranged themselves as by magic.

The great manœuvre began next day, when at an early hour the vans arrived to begin taking my furniture. That day they moved dispensable things, leaving the apparatus of bedrooms, which was to be transferred on the morrow, at the close of which I was to sleep in the new house. Dining-room furniture went on the first day, and when I came back that evening to sleep in the old house for the last time, I found it dishevelled and mournful. Canvas-packing strewed the floor, pictures were gone, and on the walls where they had hung were squares and oblongs of unfaded paper. The beauty and the amenity of the house were departed; I felt as if I had been stripping the robes off it, and its spirit shivering and in rags went silently with me as I visited the denuded rooms, with eyes of silent reproach. I was taking away from it all that it had reckoned as its own; to-morrow I, too, should desert it, and it would stand lonely and companionless. Never in those ten years had it been so pleasant to live with as in that last week; it was as if it were

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putting forth shy advances, making itself so kind and agreeable, in order to detain the tenants with whom it had passed such happy years. One by one I turned out the lights, and its spirit followed me up to my bedroom. But to-night it would not come in, and when I entered the sense of home was gone from my room.

All next day the chaos in the new house grew more and more abysmal as the vans were unloaded. The plan of putting everything instantly and firmly into its place failed to come off; for how could you put anything firmly or otherwise into the dining-room when for two hours the refrigerator blocked access to it? Meantime books were stacked on the floor, layers of pictures leaned against the walls; the hall got packed with tables and piles of curtains, and finally, about five of the afternoon, arrived the grand piano. The foreman gave but one glance at the staircase, and declared that it was quite impossible for it to go up, and pending some fresh plan for its ascension, it must needs stop in the hall too, where it stood on its side like the coffin of some enormous skate. By making yourself tall and thin you could just get by it.

Trouble increased; soon after nightfall a policeman rang at the door to tell me I had an unshaded light in a front room. So I had, and, abjectly apologizing, I explained the circumstance and quenched the light. Hardly had he gone, when another came and said I had a very bright light in a

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back room. That seemed to be true also, and since there were neither blinds nor curtains in that room, where I was trying to produce some semblance of order, my labours there must be abandoned. But the more we tidied, the more we attempted to put pieces of furniture into their places, the worse grew the confusion, and the more the floors got carpeted with china and pictures and books. It was as when you eat an artichoke, and, behold, the more you eat, the higher on your plate rises the débris.

About midnight Kino went home; the servants had gone to bed, and I was alone in this nightmare of unutterable confusion. Till one I toiled on, wondering why I had ever left the old house, where the spirit of home was now left lonely. No spirit of home had arrived here yet, and I did not wonder. But just before I went to bed I visited the kitchen to see how they had been getting on downstairs, and for a moment hope gleamed on the horizon. For sitting in the middle of the best dinner-service, which was on the floor, was Cyrus, my blue Persian cat, purring loudly. His topaz eye gleamed, and he rose up, clawing at the hay as I entered. He liked the new house; he thought it would suit him, and came upstairs with me, arching his back and rubbing himself against the corners.

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OCTOBER, 1915.

For two days the grand piano remained on its side at the bottom of the stairs, while furniture choked and eddied round it, as when a drain is stopped up and the water cannot flow away. It really seemed that it would stop there for ever, and that the only chance of playing it again involved being strapped into a chair, and laid sideways on the floor. Eventually the foreman of the removal company kindly promised to come back next morning, take out the drawing-room window, and sling the creature in. This would require a regiment of men, and the sort of tackle with which thirteen-inch guns are lifted into a ship. He hoped (he could go no further than that) that the stone window ledge would stand the strain; I hoped so too. My wits, I suppose, were sharpened by this hideous prospect, and I telephoned to the firm who had made the piano to send down three men and see if they concurred in the impossibility of getting the piano upstairs except *via* the doubtful window-ledge. In half an hour they had taken it up the staircase without touching the banisters or scratching the wall.

Magically, as by the waving of a wand, the constipation on the ground-floor was relieved; it was as if the Fairy Prince (in guise of three sainted piano-

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movers) had restored life to the house. The tables and chairs danced into their places; bookshelves became peopled with volumes; the china clattered nimbly into cupboards, and carpets unrolled themselves on the stairs. There was dawn on the wreck, and Kino and I set to work on the great scheme of black and white floor decoration which was destined to embellish in a manner unique and surprising the whole of the ground-floor.

Linoleum was the material of it, an apotheosis of linoleum. Round the walls of the passages, the hall, the front room, were to run borders of black and white, with panels in recesses, enclosing a chess-board of black and white squares. Roll after roll of linoleum arrived, and with gravers we cut them up, and tacked down the borders and the panels and the chess-board with that admirable and headless species of nail known as "little brads." The work was not noiseless like the building of the Temple of Solomon, but when it was done, my visitors were indeed Queens of Sheba, for no more spirit was left in them when on their blinded eyes there dawned the glories of the floors that were regular and clean as marble pavements, and kind to the tread. No professional hand was permitted to assist in these orgies of decoration; two inspired amateurs did it all, and one of them did about twenty times as much as the other. (The reader may form his own conclusion as to whether modesty or the low motive of seeking credit where the credit belongs to another prompts my reticence on this point.) Then there

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were wonderful things to be done with paint (and I really did a good deal of that); ugly tiles were made beautiful with shining black, that most decorative of all hues when properly used, and in one room the splendour given to a door and a chimney-piece put Pompeii in its proper place for ever. And all the time, as we worked, and put something of human personality into the house, the spirit of home was peeping in at windows shyly, tentatively, or hiding behind curtains, or going softly about the pleasant passages, till at last one evening, as we finished some arrangement of books in the front-room, I was conscious that it had come to stay. It did not any longer shrink from observation or withdraw itself when it thought I got a glimpse of it. It stood boldly out, smiling and well pleased, and next day, when I woke for a moment in the hour before dawn, with sparrow-twitters in the trees outside, it was in my room, and I turned over contentedly and went to sleep again. Was it that the disconsolate ghost in Oakley Street had come here, transferring itself from the empty shell? Had it followed, like a deserted cat, the familiar furniture, and the familiar denizens? Or had a new spirit of home been born? Certainly the conviction that the house had found itself, that it had settled down to an incarnate plane again was no drowsy fantasy of the night; for in the morning, when I went downstairs, the whole aspect of things had changed. I knew I was *chez moi*, instead of just carrying on existence in some borrowed lodging.

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That morning an enormous letter, chiefly phonetic, arrived from Seraphina. It was difficult to read, because when Seraphina wished to erase a word, she had evidently smudged her finger over the wet ink, and written something on top of it. At first I felt as bewildered as King Belshazzar, when on the wall there grew the inconjecturable doom; but since I had no Daniel in fee, I managed, by dint of trying again and again, to make out the most of her message. She relapsed sometimes into the dialect of Alatri, but chiefly she stuck to the good old plan, recommended by Mr. Roosevelt, of putting down the letters like which the word, when spoken, would sound. But by dint of saying it aloud, I caught the gist of it all. No word had come from Alatri since Francis's return, and even as I read the glamour of that remote existence grew round me.

She had written before, she said, both to Signorino Francesco and to me, but she supposed that the letters had gone wrong, for they said the Government soaked off the stamps from the envelopes and sold them again. But that was all right; they wanted every penny they could get to spend against the devil-Austrians. *Dio!* What tremendous battles! How the gallant Italian boys were sweeping them out of the Trentino! And Gorizia had fallen twenty times already. Surely it must have fallen by now. And there was the straight road to Trieste. . . .

The flame of war had set Alatri alight; there was scarce a man of military age left on the island, except the soldiers who from time to time were quar-

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tered there. The price of provisions was hideous, but thrifty folk had planted vegetables in their gardens, and if God said that only the rich might have meat, why, the poor would get on very well without. She herself had planted nutritious beans in the broad flower-bed, as soon as the flowers were over, as she had said in her previous letter (not received), and already she had made good soup from them, since Signorino Francesco had told her to use garden produce for herself. But Signora Machonochie had come to borrow some beans, and, as the beans belonged to the Signori, Seraphina wished for permission to give her them, since they would otherwise be dried, and make good soup again when the Signori returned. For herself—*scusi*—she thought the Signora Machonochie was a good soul (though greedy), for she was always making mittens for the troops on the snow of the frontier against the wintertime, and went about the roads perpetually knitting, so that one day she, not looking where she was going, charged into Ludovico's manure cart, and was much soiled. So, if it was our wish that she should have some beans, she should have them, but there would be fewer bottles in the store-room.

Then Seraphina became more of a friend, less of a careful housekeeper. She continued:

"The house expects your excellencies' dear presence whenever you can return. All the rooms are like Sunday brooches: there is no speck of dust. Pasqualino has been gone this long time, for as

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soon as we went to war with the stinking beasts, up he goes to the military office, and swears on the Holy Book that he is just turned nineteen, and has come to report himself to the authorities. Of course, they looked him out in their register, and he was but eighteen, but he confessed his perjury when it was no longer any use to deny it, and they were not displeased with him, nor did he go to prison, as happened to Luigi. But they wanted young fellows for the Red Cross who look after the wounded, and, after many prayers, Pasqualino was permitted, in spite of his perjury, to go and serve. Gold buttons, no less, on his jacket; so smart he looked; and there was Caterina smiling and crying all in one, and she gulped and kissed him, and kissed him again and gulped, and for all the world she was as proud of him as the priest on Sunday morning, and would not have had him stay. She came up here to help in the house, and it is all for love of Pasqualino, for once I offered her some *soldi* for the help she had given me in dusting, and she just smacked my hand, and the *soldi* fell out, and we kissed each other, for then I understood; and she asked to go to Pasqualino's room and sat on the bed, and looked at his washstand, and stroked the coat he had left behind. Oh, I understand young hearts, Signor, for all that I am old, and I left her alone there, and presently she came down again and told me her trouble. It was the night before he went, and your excellency must not think hardly of him or her. *Scusi,* if I give advice, but they were

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young, and did not think, for you do not think when you are young, and they are beautiful, both of them, and when they are beautiful, who can wonder? She knows he will marry her, and, indeed, Alatri knows it too, and thus the *bambino* will not be blackened. Pasqualino is a good boy, and in spite of it, she wanted him to go for the sake of the wounded, thinking nothing of herself and the little one within her. Alatri will be blind to the *bambino*, and wait for him to make it all right.

"Eh, what a pen I have, for it runs on like a tap! All this last month I have been writing a little every day, and now it is nearly finished. But still I think the Signor would like to hear of Teresa of the Cake-shop. There was never such a wonder; it was like a miracle. Suddenly she would have no more of the cake-shop, but must needs go to Naples, and learn to be a nurse, and look after the wounded, as Pasqualino had done. Never, as the Signor knows, had she gone down to the Marina since fifteen years ago (or is it sixteen?), when she went to meet her *promesso*, Vincenzo Rhombo, who had come back from Buenos Ayres, and even as he landed on the Marina, was stricken in her very arms with the cholera and died that day. Never since then had Teresa gone to the Marina, whatever was the *festa* or the fireworks; but now nothing would serve her but that she must go to help in the war. She had money, for the cake-shop had done well all these years, and she must needs go and spend her money in learning nursing in Naples. All of a sud-

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den it was so with her, and one day a month ago she asked me to come down with her to see her forth. And when we came to the Marina, Signor, she shut her eyes, for she could not bear to see it, and asked me to lead her along the quay to where the boats took off the passengers by the steamer. All along the quay I led her, she with eyes closed; but when we came to the steps, where Vincenzo had landed and fell into her arms a stricken man, then at last she opened her eyes, or the tears opened them, and she fell on her knees and kissed the place where Vincenzo had been joined to her. She kissed it, and she kissed it, and then suddenly her tears dried, and she stepped into the boat and waved her hand to her friends and said: 'Vincenzo wishes it; Vincenzo wishes it.' Oh, a brave woman! she had not baked her heart in the cake-shop.

"My humble duty to you, excellency, Seraphina has no more to say, but that often the step goes up and down in the studio. I think, as Donna Margherita said, that someone guards the house. It is as a sentry, who makes the house secure. But it will be a good day when I hear there the steps of the Signorino and of you. All humble compliments and the good wishes of a friend who is Seraphina.

"*Scusi!* Shall I sow the flower seeds in the garden that were saved from last year? If the Signori will not be here in the spring, what need to sow them, for they will keep, will they not? But if there is a chance of your coming, the garden must needs be gay with a welcome."

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Right in the middle of the black cloud of war there came a rift, as I read Seraphina's budget of news. Some breeze parted the folds of it, and I saw a peep of blue sky and bluer sea, and the stone-pine and the terraced gardens, with the morning glory rioting on the wall. But how incredibly remote it seemed, as if it belonged to some previous cycle of existence; as if the closed doors of eternity that swing shut when we are born had opened again, and I looked on some previous incarnation. I thought I remembered (before the war came) experiences like those which Seraphina's letter suggested, but they seemed like the affairs of childhood, when imagination is so mixed up with reality that we scarcely know whether there are robbers in the shrubbery or not. We pretend that there are, and even while we pretend dusk falls and the shrubbery has to be passed, and we are not certain whether there are not robbers there, after all. It was so with the recollection of the things of which Seraphina spoke (and even they were mixed up with war). I felt I might have dreamed them, or have invented them for myself, or have experienced them in some pre-natal existence. Just that one glimpse I had of them, and no more; then the rift in the clouds closed up again, and blacker than ever before, except perhaps during the days of the Retreat from Mons, grew the gigantic bastion of storm through which we had to pass. . . . Even so once, thunder-clouds collected before me when I was on the top of an Alpine peak, gathering and growing thicker

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with extraordinary swiftness. A rent came in them for a moment, and through it we could see the pastures and villages ten thousand feet below. Then it closed up, and we had to pass through the clouds out of which already the lightning was leaping before we could arrive on the safe familiar earth again.

I could scarcely realize, then, what life was like before the war, and now, looking forward, it seemed impossible to imagine that there could be any end to the murderous business. This month a wave of pessimism swept over London; even those who had been most optimistic were submerged in it; and all that was possible was to go on, the more occupied the better, and, anyhow, not to talk about it. A dozen times had our hopes flared high; a dozen times they had been extinguished.

Only a few months ago we had seen the advance of the Russian armies through Galicia, and had told each other that the relentless steam-roller had begun its irresistible progress across the Central Empires, leaving them flattened out and ground to powder in its wake. But now, instead of their being flattened out in its wake, it appeared that they had only been concentrated and piled high in front of it, for now the billow of the enemies' armies, poised and menacing, had broken and swept the steam-roller far back on the beach, where now it remained stuck in the shingle with quenched furnaces and a heavy list. Przemysl had been retaken; the newly-christened Lvoff had become Lemberg again; War-

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saw had fallen; Ivangorod had fallen; Grodno and Vilna had fallen. For the time, it is true, that great billow had spent itself, but none knew yet what damage and dislocation had been wrought on the steam-roller. Russia's friends assured us that the invincible resolve of her people had suffered no damage, and expressed their unshaken belief in the triumphant march of her destiny. But even the most eloquent preachers of confidence found it difficult to explain precisely on what their confidence was based.

That was not all, nor nearly all. In the Balkans Bulgaria had joined the enemy; the fat white fox Ferdinand had kissed his hand to his august brothers in Vienna and Berlin, and soon, when Servia had been crushed, they would meet, and in each other's presence confirm the salutation, and be-Kaiser and be-Czar each other. From one side the Austro-German advance had begun, from the other the Bulgarian, and it was certain that in a few weeks we should see Servia extinguished—exterminated even as Belgium had been. It was useless to imagine that all the despairing gallantry of that mountain people could stand against the double invasion, or to speak of the resistance in the impregnable mountain passes, which would take months to overcome. Such talk was optimism gone mad, even as in the Retreat from Mons certain incredible tacticians in the Press assured us that this was all part of a strategic move, whereby the German lines of communication would be lengthened. Certainly

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their lines of communication were being lengthened, for they were pressing the Allies, who were totally unable to stand against that first rush, across half France. So now only insane interpreters could give encouraging comments on the news from Servia. Servia, who had been but a king's pawn to open the savage game that was being played over the length and breadth of Europe, was taken and swept off the board; in a few weeks at the most we should see the power of Germany extending unbroken from Antwerp on the West to Constantinople on the East. Allied to Bulgaria and Turkey, with Servia crushed, the way to the East, should she choose to go Eastwards, lay open and undefended in front of her. It seemed more than possible, too, that Greece, who had invited the troops of the Allies to Salonika, would join the triumphant advance of the Central Empires. Our diplomacy, as if it had been some card game played by children, had been plucked from our hands and scattered over the nursery table; every chance that had been ours had been thrown on to the rubbish heap, and Germany, going to the rubbish heap, had picked up our lost opportunities and shown us how to use them. It was impossible (it would also have been silly) to be optimistic over these blunders; the Balkan business was going as badly as it possibly could.

There was worse yet. Before the end of the month no one, unless, like the ostrich, he buried his eyes in the sand and considered that because he saw nothing there was nothing to see, had any real hope

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of a successful issue to the Dardanelles expedition, and it was with an aching sense of regret that one recalled the brave days when the *Queen Elizabeth* went thundering into the Straits, and we were told that but a mile or two divided us from victory. But what miles! They seemed quite sufficient, to divide us, even as when on board ship you are told that only a plank lies between yourself and a watery grave, the plank will do very well indeed to keep off the watery grave. That mile or two had the same stubborn quality; months of valiant endeavour, endless sacrifice, and sickening mistakes had not brought us any nearer our goal.

It was useless to blink these obvious facts, and I found one morning that it would be wiser to sit down and just stare them in the face, get used to them, as far as might be, rather than shuffle them out of sight, or pretend to see silver linings to clouds which, in spite of the proverb, had not got any. There was a pit of clouds. Somehow that must be explored. It was no use to pretend to put a lid on it, and say there was no such pit. I had to go down into it.

I descended then into this "black tremendous sea of cloud." It was not the invariable daily tale of ill-success in the war that caused it to form in my brain, though I suppose it was that which consolidated it. It came like an obsession. I had gone to bed one night with hope of good news next day; I had taken pleasure in my jolly new house! I had dined with friends and I slept well. But when I

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woke the Thing was there. There was no bad news in the paper that morning, but in the papers and in my bed, and about my path, and in my breakfast, there was a blackening poison that spread and sprouted like some infernal mushroom of plague. I found that I did not care for anything any more; there was the root of this obsession. I thought of the friends I should presently meet when I went out to my work, and the thought of them roused no feeling of any kind. There was a letter from Francis, saying that in a week's time he would have three days' leave, and proposed that he should spend them with me. There was a letter from Kino, saying that he had found the book which I so much wanted, and would bring it round after breakfast, and should we go out, as we had vaguely planned, that afternoon to Kew, and get the country whiff from the flaming autumn? Certainly if he liked, thought I, for it does not matter. I did not want to go, nor did I want not to go; it was all one, for over all and in all was the blackness of the pit of clouds. We went accordingly, and to me his face and his presence were no more than the face and the presence of any stranger in the street. He had lost his meaning, he was nonsense; it might have been some gesticulating machine that walked by me. We looked at the flaring towers of golden and russet leaf, and I saw them as you see something through the wrong end of a telescope. I saw them through glass, through a diving bell. The sun was warm, the sky was flecked with the loveliest mackerel scales of

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cloud; I was with a friend stepping along mossy paths below the beech-trees, and within me was a centre-point of consciousness that only wailed and cried out at the horror of existence. The glory of the autumn day was as magnificent as ever; the smell of the earth and the tea-like odour of dry leaves had in itself all the sting and thrill that belonged to it, and by my side was the friend with whom the laying of linoleum had been so wonderful a delight, because we laid it together, and I was cut off from it all. Everything was no more than dried flowers, sapless, brittle and colourless.

Those days were no more than hours of existence, to which somehow my flesh clung, though the fact of existence was just that which was so tragic and so irremediable. By occupying myself, by doing anything definite that required attention, even if it was only acknowledging the receipt of subscriptions, or of writing begging letters on behalf of the fund for which I worked, I could cling to the sheer cliff and still keep below me that sea of cloud. But the moment that the automatism only of life was wanted, the sea rose and engulfed me again. When I walked along a street, when I sat down to eat, when, tired with conscious effort of the mind, I relaxed attention, it drowned me. The effort to keep my head above it was infinitely fatiguing, and when at nights, having been unable to find something more to do, however trivial, or when, unable to hold the dam-gate any longer, I went up to bed, the nightmare of existence yelled out and smothered

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me. Huge and encompassing, it surged about a pinprick of consciousness which was myself; black wrinkled clouds brooded from zenith to horizon, and I knew that beyond the horizon, and to innumerable horizons beyond that, there reached that interminable blackness *in saecula saeculorum*. Or, again, as in some feverish dream, behold, it was I, who just before had been a pinprick in everlasting time and space, who now swelled up to infinite dimensions, and was surrounded for ever and ever by gross and infinitesimal nothingness. At one moment I was nothing set in the middle of cosmic darkness; at the next I was cosmic darkness itself, set in a microscopic loneliness, an alpha and omega of the everlasting midnight. No footstep fell there, no face looked out from it, neither of God nor of devil, nor of human kind. I was alone, as I had always been alone; here was the truth of it, for it was but a fancy figment that there was a scheme, a connection, a knitting of the members of the world to each other, and of them to God. I had made that up myself; it was but one of the foolish stories that I had often busied myself with. But I knew better now; I was alone, and all was said.

Now there are many who have been through much darker and deeper waters than these, without approaching real melancholia. To the best of my belief I did no more than paddle at the edge of them. Certainly they seemed to close over me, except for that one fact that even where they were deepest, any manual or mental act that required definite

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thought was sufficient for the moment to give me a breath of air. All pleasure, and, so it seemed to me, all love had become obscured, but there was still some sense of decency left that prevented me from lying down on the floor, and saying in the Italian phrase, *"Non po' combattere."* There was a double consciousness still. I said to myself, "I give up!" but I didn't act as if I gave up, nor did I tell another human soul that in myself I had done so. I confessed to depression, but didn't talk about it. I wrote a perfectly normal and cordial letter to Francis, saying how welcome he would be, though I felt that there was no such person. Still, I wrote to him, and did not seriously expect that my note would be returned through the dead-letter office. And this is precisely the reason why I have written these last pages; it is to assure all those who know, from inside, what such void and darkness means, that the one anchor is employment, and the absolute necessity is behaving in a normal manner. It does not seem worth while; it seems, too, all but impossible, but it is not quite impossible, and there is nothing which is so much worth while. Until you actually go over the edge, stick to the edge. Do not look down into the abyss, keep your eyes on such ground as there is, and find something there: a tuft of grass, a fallen feather, the root of a wild plant—and look at it. If you are so fortunate as to discover a little bare root there, something easily helped, cover it up with a handful of kindly soil. (You will not slip while you are doing this.) If

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a feather, be sure that some bird has flown over, and dropped it from a sunlit wing; if a tuft of grass, think of the seed from which it came. Besides, if God wills that you go down into Hell, He is there also. . . .

Hold on, just hold on. Sometimes you will look back on the edge to which you clung, and will wonder what ailed you.

It was so with me. I merely held on till life, with its joys and its ties, began to steal back into me, even as into a dark room the light begins to filter at dawn. At no one second can you say that it is lighter than it was the second before, but if you take a series of seconds, you can see that light is in the ascendant. A certain Friday, for instance, had been quite intolerable, but, just as you look out of the window, and say "It is lighter," I found on Saturday that, though nothing in the least cheerful had happened in the interval, I didn't so earnestly object to existence, while a couple of days later I could look back on Friday and wonder what it had all been about. What it had been about I do not know now: some minute cell, I suppose, had worked imperfectly, and lo! "the scheme of things entire" not only seemed, but, I was convinced, was all wrong. Subjective though the disturbance was, it could project itself and poison the world.

Two things certainly I learned from it, namely, that manual or mental employment, hateful though it is to the afflicted, is less afflicting than idleness; the second, that the more you keep your depres-

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sion to yourself the better. I wish that the infernal pessimists whose presence blackens London would learn this. These ravens with their lugubrious faces and their croaking accents, hop obscenely about from house to house, with a wallet full of stories which always begin, "They say that—" and there follows a tissue of mournful prognostications. They project their subjective disturbance, and their tale beginning "They say that—" or "I am told that—" generally means that Mr. A. and Mr. B., having nothing to do, and nothing to think about, have sat by the fire and ignorantly wondered what is going to happen. Having fixed on the worst thing, whatever it is, that their bilious imagination can suggest, they go out to lunch, and in accents of woe proceed to relate that "They say that—" and state all the dismal forebodings which their solitary meditations have hatched. In fact, the chief reason for which I wish that I was a Member of Parliament is that I could then bring in a Bill (or attempt to do so) for the Suppression of Pessimists. I would also gladly vote for a Bill that provided for the Suppression of Extreme Optimists on the same grounds, namely, that to be told that the Kaiser has cancer, and that the burgesses of Berlin are already starving, leads to a reaction such as the pessimists produce by direct means. To be told that the Russians are incapable of further resistance on the authority of "They say that—" depresses everybody at once; and to be told that there isn't a potato to be had in all Germany for love or money (particularly

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money) gives rise to an alcoholic cheerfulness which dies out and leaves you with a headache of deferred hopes. These grinning optimists were particularly hard to bear when the terrible Retreat from Mons was going on, for they screamed with delight at the notion that we were lengthening out the German lines of communication, which subsequently would be cut, as by a pair of nail-scissors lightly wielded, and the flower of the German army neatly plucked like a defenceless wayside blossom. The same smiling idiots were to the fore again during the great Russian retreat, and told us to wait, finger on lip, with rapturous eyes, till the Germans had reached the central steppes of Russia, when they would all swiftly expire of frosts, Cossacks and inanition. But, after all, these rose-coloured folk do very little harm; they make us go about our work with a heady sense of exhilaration, which, though it soon passes off, is by no means unpleasant. At the worst extreme optimists are only fools on the right side, whereas pessimists are bores and beasts on the wrong one.

Pessimists have had a high old time all this month. They do not exactly rejoice when things go ill for us, but misfortune has a certain sour satisfaction for them, because it fulfils what they thought (and said) in September. Thus now they nod and sigh, and proceed to tell us what they augur for November. If only they would keep their misery to themselves, nobody would care how miserable they are; but the gratuitous diffusion of it is what should be

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made illegal. For the microbe of pessimism is the most infectious of bacteria; it spreads in such a manner that all decent-minded folk, when they have fallen victims to it, ought surely (on the analogy of what they would do if it was influenza) to shut themselves up and refuse to see anybody. But because the disease is one of the mind, it appears that it is quite proper for the sufferer to go and sneeze in other people's faces. There ought to be a board of moral health, which by its regulations would make it criminal to spread mental disorders, such as pessimism. I had so severe an attack of it myself, when the clouds encompassed me, that I have a certain right to propose legislation on the subject. Those afflicted by the painful disease which, like typhoid, is only conveyed through the mouth, in terms of articulate speech, should be fined some moderate sum for any speech that was likely to propagate pessimism. If the disease is acute, and the sufferer feels himself in serious danger of bursting unless he talks, he would of course be at liberty to shut himself up in any convenient room out of earshot, and talk till he felt better. Only it should be on his responsibility that his conversation should not be overheard by anybody, and, in suspension of the common law of England, a wife should be competent to witness against her husband.

It is not because the ravens are such liars that I complain, for lying is the sort of thing that may happen to anybody, but it is the depressing nature of their lies. The famous national outburst of lying

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that took place over the supposed passage of hundreds of thousands of Russians through England on their way to the battle-fields of France and Flanders was harmless, inspiriting lying. So, too, the splendid mendacity that seized so many of our citizens on the occasion of the second Zeppelin raid. That ubiquitous airship I verily believe was seen hovering over every dwelling-house in London; it hovered in Kensington, in Belgravia, in Mayfair, in Hampstead, in Chelsea, and the best of it was that it never came near these districts at all. In fact, it became a mere commonplace that it hovered over your house, and a more soaring breed of liars arose. One asserted that on looking up he had seen their horrid German faces leaning over the side of the car; another, that the cigar-shaped shadow of it passed over his blind. Of course, it passed over Brompton Square, on which the Zeppelinians were preparing to drop bombs, thinking that the dome of the Oratory was the dome of St. Paul's, and that they had thus a good chance of destroying the Bank of England. But in the stillness of the night, amid the soft murmurs of the anti-aircraft guns, a guttural voice from above was heard to say, "Nein: das ist nicht St. Paul's," and the engine of destruction passed on, leaving us unharmed. Was not that a fortunate thing?

Of course, by the time the Zeppelins began to visit us, we had all had a good deal of practice in lying, which accounted for the gorgeous oriental colouring of such amazing imaginings. But the pio-

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neers of this great revival of the cult of Ananias, were undoubtedly that multitude whom none can number, who were ready to produce (or manufacture) any amount of evidence to prove that soon after the outbreak of the war battalions of Russian troops in special trains, with blinds drawn down, were dashing through the country. It is a thousand pities that some serious and industrious historian was not commissioned by his Government to collect the evidence and issue it in tabulated form, for it would have proved an invaluable contribution to psychology. There was never any first-hand evidence on the subject (for the simple reason that the subject had no real existence), but the mass of secondhand evidences went far to prove the non-existent. From Aberdeen to Southampton there was scarcely a station at which a porter had not seen these army corps and told somebody's gardener. The accounts tallied remarkably, the trains invariably had their blinds drawn down, and occasionally bearded soldiers peered out of the windows. There was a camp of them on Salisbury Plain, and hundreds of Englishmen who knew no language but their own, distinctly heard them talking Russian to each other. Sometimes stations (as at Reading) had platforms boarded up to exclude the public, and the public from neighbouring eminences saw the bearded soldiers drinking quantities of tea out of samovars. This was fine imaginative stuff, for the samovar, of course, is an urn, and nobody but a Russian, surely, would drink tea out of an urn.

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There was collateral evidence, too: one day the *Celtic* was mined somewhere in the North Sea; she had on board tons of ammunition and big guns, and for a while the hosts of Russia did not appear in the fighting line, because they had remained on Salisbury Plain till fresh supplies of ammunition came. Bolder spirits essayed higher flights: At Swindon Station, so the porter told the gardener, they had been seen walking about the platform stamping the snow off their boots, which proved they had come from far North, where the snow is of so perdurable a quality that it travels like blocks of ice from Norwegian lakes without apparently melting even in the middle of a hot September. Or again, in the neighbourhood of Hatfield the usual gardener had heard that a *képi* had been picked up on the road, and what do you think was the name of the maker printed inside it? Why, the leading military outfitter of Nijni-Novgorod! There was glory for you, as Humpty-Dumpty said. The gardener fortunately knew who the leading military outfitter of Nijni-Novgorod was, while regarded as a proof what more could anybody want? How could a Russian *képi* have been dropped on the North Road unless at least a hundred thousand Russians had been going in special trains through England? I suppose you would not want them *all* to throw their *képis* away.

There were hundreds of such stories, none first hand, but overwhelming in matter of cumulative secondhand evidence, all springing from nowhere but

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the unassisted brain of ordinary Englishmen. The wish was father to the thought; in the great peril that still menaced the French and English battle-line, we all wanted hundreds of thousands of Russians, and so we said that they were passing through. Some cowardly rationalist, I believe, has explained the whole matter by saying that some firm telegraphed that a hundred thousand Russians (whereby he meant Russian eggs) were arriving. I scorn the truckling materialism of this. The Russian stories were invented, bit by bit, even as coral grows, by innumerable and busy liars, spurred on by the desire that their fabrications might be true. Bitter animosities sprang up between those who did and those who did not believe the Russian Saga. Single old ladies, to whom the idea that Russia was pouring in to help us was very comforting, altered their wills and cut off faithless nephews, and the most stubborn Thomases amongst us were forced to confess that there seemed to be a good deal to say for it, while the fact that the War Office strenuously denied the whole thing was easily accounted for. Of course the War Office denied it, for it didn't want the Germans to know. It would be a fine surprise for the Germans on the West Front to find themselves one morning facing serried rows of Russians. . . . They would be utterly bewildered, for they had been under the impression that Russia was far away East, on the other side of the Fatherland; but here were the Russian armies! They would think their compasses had gone mad; they would

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have been quite giddy with surprise, and have got that lost feeling which does so much to undermine the morale of troops. Oh, a great stroke!

But all these Russian and Zeppelin Saga were good heady, encouraging lies, tonic instead of lowering, like the dejected inventions of prostrate pessimists. I do not defend, on principle, the habit of making up stories and saying that a porter at Reading told your gardener; but, given that you are going to do that sort of thing, I do maintain that you are bound to invent such stores as will encourage and not depress your credulous friends. You have no right to attempt to rob them of their most precious possession in times like these, namely, the power of steadfast resistance of the spirit to trouble and anxiety, by inventing further causes of depression. The law forbids you to take away a man's forks and spoons; it ought also to forbid the dissemination of such false news as will deprive him of his appetite for his mutton chop.

Indeed, I fancy that by the law of England as laid down in the statute-book it is treasonable in times of national crisis to discourage the subjects of the King, and I wonder whether it would not be possible, as there has been so little grouse-shooting this year, to have a grouser-shoot instead. A quantity of old birds want clearing off. Guns might be placed, let us say, in butts erected along the south side of Piccadilly, and the grousers would be driven from the moors of Mayfair by a line of beaters starting from Oxford Street. The game would break

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cover, so I suppose, from Dover Street, Berkeley Street, Half Moon Street, and so on, and to prevent their escaping into Regent Street on the one side and Park Lane on the other, stops would be placed at the entrance of streets debouching here in the shape of huge posters announcing victories by land and sea for the Allied forces. These the grousers would naturally be unable to pass, and thus they would be driven out into Piccadilly and shot. This would take the morning, and after a good lunch at the Ritz Hotel the shooters would proceed to the covers of Kensington. Other days would, of course, be arranged. . . .

But all this month the devastating tide swept on through Serbia. Occasionally there were checks, as, for a moment, it dashed against some little reef before submerging it; but soon wave succeeding wave overleaped such barriers, and now Serbia lies under the waters of the inundation. And in these shortening days of autumn the sky grows red in the East with the dawning of new fires of battle, and to the watchers there it goes down red in the West, where from Switzerland to the sea, behind the trenches, the graveyards stretch themselves out over the unsown fields of France.

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NOVEMBER, 1915.

FRANCIS arrived on the last day of October, with a week's leave before his regiment embarked for the Dardanelles. For a few hours he was a mere mass of physical needs; until these were satisfied he announced himself as incapable of thinking or speaking of anything but the carnalities.

"Tea at once," he said. "No, I think I won't have tea with you; I want tea sent up to the bath-room. That packet? It's a jar of bath salts—verbena—all of which I am going to use. I saw it in a shop window, and quite suddenly I knew I wanted it. Nothing else seemed to matter. I want a dressing-gown, too. Will you lend me one? And slippers. For a few hours I propose to wallow in a sensual sty. I've planned it all, and for the last week I have thought of nothing else."

He sketched the sty. There was to be tea in the bath-room and a muffin for tea. This he would eat as he lay in a hot bath full of verbena salts. He would then put on his dressing-gown and lie in bed for half an hour, reading a shilling shocker and smoking cigarettes. (End of Part I.) Still in his dressing-gown he would come downstairs, and smoke more cigarettes before my fire, till it was time to have a cocktail. We would dine at home (he left

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the question of dinner to me, provided only that there should be a pineapple), after which we should go to the movies. We were then to drive rapidly home in a taxi, and, over sandwiches and whisky and soda, he felt that he would return to a normal level again. But the idea of being completely comfortable and clean and gorged and amused for a few hours had taken such hold of him, that he could not "reach his mind" until the howling beast of his body had been satisfied. That, at least, was the plan.

Accordingly, proclamation having come from upstairs that all was ready, Francis departed to his sty, and I, as commanded, waited till such time as he should reappear in my dressing-gown and slippers. But long before his programme (Part I.) could have been carried out he re-entered.

"It didn't seem worth while to get into bed," he said, "so I left that out. I loved the bath-salts, and the tea was excellent. But how soon anything that can be satisfied is satisfied. It's only——"

He leaned forward and poked the fire, stretching his legs out towards the blaze.

"I've travelled a long way since we met," he said, "and the further one goes the simpler the way becomes. The mystics are perfectly right. You can only get what you want, what your soul wants, by chucking away all that you have. The only way to find yourself is to lose yourself. I've been losing myself all these months, and I began to recover little bits of me that I didn't want over the muffin

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and the verbena. I was afraid I should find more if I tucked up in bed. That's why I didn't. I used to want such lots of things; now there is growing a pile of things I don't want."

I put the cigarette-box near him.

"There are the smokes," I said, "and let me know when you want a cocktail. We'll have dinner when you like. Now I have heard nothing from you for the last three months; let's have a budget."

"Right. Well, the material side of the affair is soon done with. I'm Quartermaster-Sergeant, with stripes and a crown on my arm, as you have noticed, and I live immersed in accounts and stores and supplies. I have to see that the men have enough and are comfortable, and I have to be as economical as I can. That's my life, and it's being my salvation."

He lay back in his chair, the picture of complete indolence, with eyes half closed. But I knew that to be a sign of intense internal activity. Most people, I am aware, when they are aflame with some mental or spiritual topic, walk up and down with bright eyes and gesticulating hands. But it is Francis's great conjuring trick to disconnect his physical self, so to speak, and let it lie indolent; his theory is that thus your vitality is concentrated on thought. There seems something to be said for it, when once you have learned how to do it.

"Of course, in order to get anywhere," he said, "you must go through contemplative periods and stages, and towards the end of the journey, I fancy that you enter into an existence where only that is

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possible. But before that comes, you have to know the sacredness of common things. It's like this. The first stage is to know that the only thing worth our consideration is the reality that lies behind common things: it is then that you think them worthless and disregard them. But further on you find out that they aren't common, because the reality behind permeates them, and makes them sacred. Later, if you ever get there, you find, I believe, that in your union with the reality behind, they cease to exist again for you. But, good heavens, what miles apart, are the first and third stages! And the danger of the first stage is that, if you are not careful, you imagine it to be the same as the third.

"I was in danger of getting like that, living in perfect comfort and peace on that adorable island. Do you know how a jelly looks the day after a dinner-party, how it is fatigued, and lies down and gets shapeless and soft? I might have stayed in that stage, if the war hadn't summoned me. I did not consciously want material things: I was not greedy or lustful, and I had a perfectly conscious knowledge that God existed in everything. But I didn't reverence things for that reason, nor did I mix myself up in them. I held aloof, and was content to think. Then came the war, and now for nearly fifteen months I have been learning to get close to common things, to see, as I said, that the sacredness of their origin pervades them. It doesn't lie in them, tucked away in some secret drawer, which you have to open by touching a spring. The

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spring you have to touch is in yourself, you have to open your own perception of what is always before your eyes. It doesn't require any wit or poetic sense to perceive it: it is there, a plain simple phenomenon. But in it is the answer to the whole cosmic conundrum, for there lies the Love that 'moves the sun and the other stars!' Theoretically I knew that, but not practically.

"Now, after a good deal of what you might call spade-work, I'm beginning to feel that, first-hand. For months I hated the drill, and the sordidness (so I said) and the life in which you are so seldom alone. I hated the rough clothes, and the heavy boots and the food. But I never hated the other fellows: I've always liked people. Then when I got on I hated the accounts I had to do, and the supplies I had to weigh, but in one thing I never faltered, and that was in the desire to get at what lay behind it all. There was something more in it than the fact that the work had to be done because England was at war with Germany, and because I wanted to help. That was sufficient to bring me out of Alatri, and it would have been sufficient to carry me along, even if there had been nothing else behind it. But always I had the knowledge of there being something else behind. And clearly the life I was leading gave me admirable conditions for finding that out. Everything was very simple: I had no independence; I had to do what I was told. You may bet that obedience is the key to freedom.

"There were days of storm and days of peace,

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of course. There were darknesses in which one was tempted to say that there wasn't anything to be perceived. Some persistent devil inside me kept suggesting that an account-book was just an account-book, and a rifle nothing more than a rifle. But I still clung to that which had grown, in all those years at Alatri, to be a matter of knowledge. I knew there was something behind, and I knew what it was, though the mists obscured it, just as when the sea-fog comes down in the winter over the island, and you cannot see the mainland for days together. But you don't seriously question whether the mainland is there because you don't see it. A child might: if you told a child that the mainland had been taken away, he would probably accept what you said. . . . There were days when I doubted everything, not only the reality at the back of it all, but even the immediate cause for my work, namely, that the regiment was part of the army that was fighting the Germans, and that so it was my job to help.

"And then, one day when I was least expecting it or consciously thinking of it, the knowledge came with that sense of realization that makes all the difference between theoretical and practical knowledge. I was among the stores, rather busy, and suddenly the tins of petroleum shone with God. Just that."

He turned his handsome, merry face to me: there was no solemnity in it, it was as if he had told me some cheerful piece of ordinary news.

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"Now will you understand me when I say that that moment was in no sense overwhelming, nor did it interfere in the slightest degree with either the common work of the day, drill and accounts and what not, or with the common diversions of the day? It did not even give them a new meaning, for I had known for years that the meaning was there; only, it had not been to me a matter of practical knowledge. It was like—well, you know how slow I am at learning anything on the piano, but with sufficient industry I can get a thing by heart at last. It was like that: it was like the first occasion on which one plays it by heart. It did not yet, nor does it now get between me and all the things that fill the day. It is not a veil drawn between me and them, so that drudgery and little menial offices are no longer worth while: it is just the opposite: it is as if a veil were drawn away, and I can see them and handle them more clearly and efficiently, and enjoy them infinitely more. This warm fire feels more delightfully comfortable than ever a fire did. I take more pleasure in seeing you sitting there near me than ever before. There was never such a good muffin as the one you sent up to the bath-room. That's only natural, if you come to think of it. It would be a very odd sort of illumination, if it served only to make what we have got to do obscure or tiresome or trivial. Instead, it redeems the common things from triviality. It takes weariness out of the world."

"You said the petroleum-tins shone with God,"

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I said. "Can you tell me about that? Was it a visible light?"

"I wondered if you would ask that," he said, "and I wish I could explain it better. There was no visible light, nothing like physical illumination round them. But my eyes told that faculty within me which truly perceives, that they shone. What does St. Paul call it? 'The light invisible,' isn't it? That is exactly descriptive. 'The light invisible, the uncreated light.' I can't tell you more than that, and I expect that it is only to be understood by those who have seen it. I am quite conscious that my description of it must mean nothing. I have long known it was there, and so have you, but till I perceived it I had no idea what it was like."

"There's another thing," said I, "you are going out next week to the Dardanelles. What does the business of killing look like in the light of the light invisible?"

He laughed again.

"It hasn't turned me into a conscientious objector, if you mean that," he said. "I hate the notion of shooting jolly funny rabbits, or merry partridges, though I'm quite inconsistent enough to eat them when they are shot—at least, not rabbits: I would as soon eat rats. But I shall do my best to kill as many Turks as I possibly can. I *know* it's right that we should win this war. I was never more certain about anything. The Prussian standpoint is the devil's standpoint, and since it's our business to fight the devil, we've got to fight the Prussians

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and all who are allied with them. It seems a miserable way of fighting the devil, to go potting Turks. If I could only get to know the fellows I hope I am going to kill, I would bet that I should find them awfully decent chaps. I shouldn't be surprised if they would shine, too, like the petroleum-tins. But there's no other alternative. No doubt if our diplomatists hadn't been such apes, we should be friends with the Turks, instead of being their enemies, but, as it is, there's no help for it. I've no patience with pacificists; we've got to fight, unless we choose to renounce God. As for the man who has a conscientious objection to killing anybody, I think you will find very often that he has a conscientious objection to being killed. I haven't any conscientious objection to either. I shall be delighted to kill Turks, and I'm sure I don't grudge them the pleasure of killing me."

"But you think they're fighting on the devil's side," I objected. "You don't want to be downed by the devil?"

"Oh, they don't down me by shooting me," he said. "Also, they don't think they are in league with the devil; at least, we must give them the credit of not thinking so, and they've got every bit as good a right to their view as I have. Lord! I am glad, if I may say it without profanity, that I'm not God. Fancy having millions and millions of prayers, good sincere honest prayers, addressed to you every day from opposite sides, entreating you to grant supplications for victory! Awfully puz-

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zling, for Him! You'd know what excellent fellows a lot of our enemies are."

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed at this moment, and Francis jumped up with a squeal.

"Eight o'clock already!" he said. "What an idiot you are for letting me jaw along like this! I'm not dressed yet, nor are you."

"You may dine in a dressing-gown if you like," I said.

"Thanks, but I don't want to in the least. I want to put on the fine new dress-clothes which I left here a year ago. Do dress too; let's put on white ties and white waistcoats, and be smart, and pompous. I love the feeling of being dressed up. Perhaps we won't go to the movies afterwards; what do you think? We can't enjoy ourselves more than sitting in this jolly room and talking. At least, I can't; I don't know about you. Oh, and another thing. You have a day off to-morrow, haven't you, it being Saturday? Let's go and stay in the country till Monday. I've been in a town for so many months. Let's go to an inn somewhere where there are downs and trees, and nobody to bother. If we stayed with people, we should have to be polite and punctual. I don't want to be either. I don't want to hold forth about being a Tommy, except to you. Most people think there's something heroic and marvellous about it, and they make me feel self-conscious. It's no more heroic than eating when you're hungry. You want to: you've got to: your

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inside cries out for food, it scolds you till you give it some."

We put Francis's plan into execution next morning, and at an early hour left town for a certain inn, of which I had pleasant memories, on the shore of the great open sea of Ashdown Forest, to spend three days there, for I got rid of my work on Monday. St. Martin came with us and gave us warm windless days of sun, and nights with a scrap of frost tingling from the stars, so that in the morning the white rime turned the blades of grass into spears of jewellery, and the adorable sharp scent of autumn mornings pricked the nostrils. The great joyful forest was ablaze with the red-gold livery of beech trees, and the pale gold of birches, and holly trees wore clusters of scarlet berries among their stiff varnished foliage. Elsewhere battalions of pines with tawny stems defied the spirit of the falling leaf, and clad the hill-sides with tufts of green serge, in which there sounded the murmur of distant seas. Here the foot slid over floors of fallen needles, and in the vaulted darkness, where scarce a ray of sun filtered down, there seemed to beat the very heart of the forest, and we went softly, not knowing but that presently some sharp-eared faun might peep round a tree-trunk, or a flying drapery betray a dryad of the woods.

Deeper and deeper we went into the primeval aisles, among the Druid trees that stood, finger on lip, for perhaps even Pan himself had lately passed

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that way, and they, initiate, had looked on the incarnate spirit of Nature. Then, distantly, the gleam of sunshine between the trunks would show the gates of this temple of forest, and we passed out again into broad open spaces, covered with the russet of bracken, and stiff with ling, on which the spikes of minute blossom were still pink. Here we tramped till the frosted dews had melted and dried, and sat in mossy hollows, where gorse was still a-flower, and smelled of cocoa-nut biscuits. Across the weald the long line of South Downs, made millions of years ago by uncounted myriads of live things, was thrust up like some heaving shoulder of a marine monster above the waves. It seemed necessary to walk along that heavenly ridge, and next day, we drove to Lewes, and with pockets bulging with lunch, climbed on to that fair and empty place. There, with all Sussex lying below us, and the sea stretched like a brass wire along the edge of the land to the south, we made a *cache,* containing the record of the expedition, and buried it in a tin-box below a certain gnarled stump that stood on the edge of the steep descent on to the plain. Francis insisted also on leaving our empty wine bottle there, with a wisp of paper inside it, on which he wrote: "We are now utterly without food, and have already eaten the third mate. Tough, but otherwise excellent. Latitude unknown: longitude unknown: God help us!" And he signed it with the names of Queen Adelaide and Marcus Aurelius. Neither he nor I could think of anything sillier than

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this, and since, when you are being silly, you have to get sillier and sillier, or else you are involved in anticlimaxes, he rolled over on to his face and became serious again.

"Lord, Lord, how I love life!" he said, "in whatever form it manifests itself. I love these great open and empty places, and the smile of the indolent earth. Great kind Mother, she is getting sleepy, and will soon withdraw all her thoughts back into herself and doze and dream till spring awakens her again. She will make no more birds and beasts and flowers yet awhile, for those are the thoughts she puts out, but collect herself into herself, hybernating in the infinite cave of the heavens. All the spring and the summer she has been so busy, thinking, thinking, and putting forth her thoughts. In the autumn she lies down and just looks at what she has made, and in the winter she sleeps. I love that life of the earth, which is so curiously independent of ours, pagan in its essence, you would think, and taking very little heed of the children of men and the sons of God. How odd she must think our businesses and ambitions, she who only makes, and feeds. What a spendthrift, too, how lavish of life, how indifferent to pain, and death, and all the ills that her nurselings make for themselves. She doesn't care, bless you."

"You called her kind just now," I remarked.

"Yes, she is kind to joy, because joy is productive. She loves health and vitality and love, but she has no use for anything else. It is only one aspect

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of her, however, the pagan side, which sets Pan afluting in the thickets. But what she makes is always greater than she who made it. She gives us and maintains for us till death our physical nature, and yet the moment she has given it us, even before perhaps, it has passed out of her hands, being transfused with God. Then, when she has done with us, she lets death overtake us, and has no more use for us, except in so far that our bodies can enrich her soil. She does not know, the pagan earth, that death is only an incident in our lives. The death of our body, as St. Francis says, is only our sister, for whom we should praise God just as much as for our life, or the sun and moon. Really, I don't know what I should do, how I should behave, if I thought it ever so faintly possible that death was the end of us. Should I take immense care of myself, so as to put off that end as long as possible, and in the interval grab at every pleasure and delight I could find? I don't think so. If I thought that death was the end, I think I should kill myself instantly, out of sheer boredom. All the bubble would have gone out of the champagne. I love all the pleasures and interests of life just because they are part of an infinitely bigger affair. If there wasn't that within them, I don't think I should care about them."

"But if they are only part of the bigger thing," said I, "why don't we kill ourselves at once, in order to get to the bigger thing?"

"Surely for a very good reason, namely, that what-

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ever life lies beyond, it cannot be this life again. And this life is such awful fun: I want lots of it. But it doesn't rank in the same class with the other. I mean that no sensible fellow will want to prolong this at the expense of what comes after. Much as we like it, we are perfectly willing to throw it away if we are shown a sufficiently good cause to throw it away for. It's like a tooth: have it out if it aches. And life would ache abominably if we clung to it unworthily."

Suddenly I felt horribly depressed.

"Oh, Francis, don't die at the Dardanelles," I said.

"I haven't the slightest intention of doing so. I sincerely hope I shall do nothing of the sort. But if I do, mind you remember that I know it is only an incident in life. As we sit here, secure in the sun and the safety, it is easy enough to realize that. But it is harder to realize it when it happens to someone you like, and people are apt to talk rot about the cruel cutting-short of a bright young life. My bright middle-aged life mustn't rouse these silly reflections, please, if it's cut off. They are unreal: there is a touch of cant about them. So promise!"

"If you'll promise not to die, I'll promise not to be vexed at your death. Besides, you aren't middle-aged; you're about fourteen."

"Oh, I hope I'm younger now at thirty-five than I was when I was fourteen. I used to be terribly serious at fourteen, and think about my soul in a way that was positively sickening. I wonder my

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bright young life wasn't cut short by a spasm of self-edification. I was a prig, and prigs are the oldest people in the world. They are older than the rocks they sit among, as Mr. Pater said, and have been dead many times. You didn't know me then, thank God."

"Were you very beastly?"

"Yes, quite horrible, and so old. Easily old enough to be my own father now, if that's what Wordsworth means when he says the child is father to the man. I thought a lot about my soul, and took great care of it, and wrapped it up. In fact, I set about everything entirely the wrong way. What does Thomas à Kempis say, do you remember? That a man must forsake himself, and go wholly from himself, and retain nothing out of self-love. He must give up his soul too, for it is only by giving it up that he avoids losing it. . . ."

He turned over again on his face, sniffing a sprig of thyme that still lingered into November.

"And yet, oh, how I love all the jolly things in the world!" he said; "but I don't want them to be mine, and I don't think that I am entangled in them. Surely it is right to love them if you don't cling to them. I love the smile of the earth when she wakes in spring, and puts forth her thoughts again. When she thinks about hawthorn, she thinks in little squibs of green leaf, when she thinks about birds she thinks in terms of nightingale-song, or when she thinks about crocuses she sees her thoughts expressed in yellow chalices, with pollen-coated

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tongues. She thinks she has had enough of the grey winter-withered grass, and, lo, the phalanxes of minute green spears charge and rout it. She thinks in the scent of wall-flowers, and the swift running of lizards on the stone-walls, and pink of peach-blossom, and foam of orchid-flower. My goodness, what a poet she is!"

"And you aren't attached to all that?" I asked.

"Of course I like it tremendously, but it doesn't entangle me any more. But I took years to disentangle myself, all those years when you thought I was being so lazy and ineffective in Alatri. Ineffective I was, no one ever made less of a splash than I have done; but lazy I wasn't. I thought, and I thought, and unconsciously to myself, while I was sunk, as I imagined, in a stupor of purring content with the world, this war woke me up, and, as you know, I found I wasn't entangled. But I have learned such a lot this year. I always liked people: I liked their funny ridiculous ways, their queernesses and their attractions. But I never got into them before. People are like oranges: the rind smells delicious, you like them first for the rind. Then just inside the rind you find that fluffy white stuff, but inside of all is the substance of them, in which lies their unity with God. There is this, too: when you get down to the fruit, you find that it has the same savour as the rind. I take it that the attraction of people, the thing you love them for, is the first thing you perceive about them, the aromatic rind. It's a hint of what is within, if you

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get through their fluffy part. You find first of all the emanation of their real selves, next their funny odd ways, and finally themselves. Deep in the heart of everyone you find what seemed at first their most superficial qualities. That's an excursus by the way; think it out for yourself."

The sun was already wheeling westwards, and presently after, as we had half a dozen miles of this high down-land to traverse, we got up and went on our way. Here and there a copse of flaming beech climbed like stealthy fire up from the weald on to this roof of South England, on the ridge of which we walked; but the prevalent wind from the sea had so continuously blown their branches in one direction that now they grew there, brushed back in permanence, as Francis suggested, like the hair of a Knut. Northwards and far below the weald stretched into misty distances, laid out like a map, with here and there a pond, here a group of clustered houses, while a moving plume of steam marked the passage of a train. Mile after mile of springy turf we traversed, empty and yellowing and uniform, save where a patch of brambles lay dark, like the shadow from a cloud. Once or twice we passed a dew-pond dug in the chalk, but otherwise in all those miles we found no sign up here on the heights of the fretful ways and works of man. All was untouched and antique: a thousand years had wrought no more change here than on the liquid plain of the sea. A steady westerly breeze met us all the way, warmed with the leagues

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of autumn sunshine through which it had travelled all day, and it streamed past us like some quiet flowing river out of the eternal reservoir of the sky. And never, even in children, round whom there still trail the clouds of glory, have I seen such ecstatic and natural enjoyment as was Francis's. Around them, perhaps, linger the lights that play outside the prison-house, but to him, it seemed that into the prison-house itself there streamed in such a jubilation of sunshine that every vestige of shade was banished. Like the petroleum-tins, when first illumination had come to him, the whole world shone with God, and that in no vague and mystical manner, but with a defined and comprehended brightness. Here was no dream-like mysticism, no indifferent contemplation like that of the Quietists, but an active and ecstatic enjoyment, eager and alert, and altogether human. He moved in a fairyland, the magic of which was not imaginary and fabulous; the spell lay in the very fact that it was real. He was convinced by the conviction that comes from personal experience: the glory that enveloped the world was as certain as the streaming wind and the pervasion of the autumn sun.

It was no haphazard intoxication of animal spirits that possessed him, no wild primal delight in health and physical vigour, it was a joy that had had its birth in thought and contemplation, and had passed through dark places and deserts. But, even as the sunlight of ages past sleeps in seams of coal, ready to burst into blaze, so through

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darknesses and doubts had passed the potential sunlight of his soul, black, you would say, and dormant, but alive and pregnant with flame, when the finger of God touched it into illumination. For him no longer in gloomy recesses sat Pan, the incarnate aspect of the cruelty and the lust of Nature, the sight of whom meant death to the seer, but over all the world shone the face of Christ, Who, by the one oblation of Himself, had transfused His divine nature into all that lived and moved. This was no fact just accepted, and taken for granted: it was the light from which sprang all his joy of life, the one central and experienced truth which made all common things sacred, and opened for him, as for all mystics who have attained the first illumination, the gates of pearl within which shines the Heavenly Kingdom. This was no visionary place: it stood solid about him, an Earthly Paradise no less than a heavenly, and men and women were its citizens, the hills and valleys, the birds and beasts of this actual world were of it, the blaze of the westering sun lit it, and this wind from the West streamed over it. And yet it was the actual kingdom of heaven.

Francis told me that day how he had attained to where he stood. It was by no vague inactive passivity, but by stern and unremitting training of the mind and spirit. He had learned by hard work, first of all, to concentrate his mind on some given concrete object, to the exclusion of all other objects, forcing himself, as he put it, "to flow into this one

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thing." By slow degrees he had so cultivated this power that he was able at last to be conscious of nothing else than that on which he fixed his attention, making all his faculties of perception concentrate upon it. One of the objects of his meditation had often been the stone pine in our garden at Alatri, and "opening himself to it," as he said, he saw it not only as it was in shape and form, but into his mind were conveyed its whole nature and formation; not by imagining them, so it seemed to him, for himself, but by receiving suggestions from outside. He felt it growing from the pine-seed of a cone that had dropped there; he felt it as a sapling, and knew how its roots were groping their ways underground, one to the north, another to the south, to anchor it from the stress of winds. He felt the word go forth among the spiders and creeping things that here was a new city a-building for their habitations. Out of the sapling stage it passed into mature life, and stripped itself of its lower branches, concentrating its energy on its crown of foliage. The soft sappy bark hardened itself to resist the rains, the roots spread further and further, and burrowed more deeply: the murmur of sea began to nest in its branches, and its shadow spread like a pool around it. It grew fruitful with cones that opened themselves so that its seed might ripen; it became a town of fertility. All this came, not student-wise, but from eager meditation, a vision evoked not from within, but seen through the open win-

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dows of his mind. A new mode of sight dawned on him.

From meditation on concrete and visible things he passed to meditation on abstract qualities, which clothed themselves in images. He saw Mercy, a woman with hands of compassion, touching and remitting the debts of the crowd that brought the penalties they had incurred: he saw Truth, nude and splendid, standing on the beach, fresh from the sea, with a smile for those who ignorantly feared him, and anger blazing from his eyes for those who tried to hide from him, and hands of love for those who came to him. But such visions never came to the scope of his physical sight, only by interior vision did he see Mercy bending to him, and Truth holding out a strong and tender hand. Their presences lived with him, and the gradual realization of them caused a shining company to stand round him.

But they were not what he sought: he sought that which lay behind them, that of which, for all their splendour, they were but the pale symbols and imperfect expressions. They were the heralds of the King, who attended in his presence-chamber, and came forth into the world radiant with his tokens. There were strange presences among them: there came Sorrow with bowed head, and Pain with pierced hands, and that darkness of the soul which still refuses to disbelieve in light. Often he turned his face from these storm-vexed visitants, crying out that they were but phantoms of the pit, and yet

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not quite endorsing his rejection of them, for their wounded hands shone, and there lurked a secret behind the tragedy of their faces. . . .

We had come to the end of the ridge, and must descend into the plain below us. The sun had just set, and the wind that still blew steadily from the West held its breath for a moment.

"They took their places there," said Francis, "until they became friendly and glorious, and I did not fear them any longer. I knew what they represented, of what they were the symbols. Just as I had contemplated the stone pine till I saw what was the nature from which it sprang, so I contemplated Sorrow and Doubt, till I saw that they had come from the Garden of Gethsemane. They are as holy as Mercy or Truth, and their touch sanctifies all the pain and sorrow that you and I and the whole world can ever feel. I dwelt within them. I learned to love them. I learned also to do the daily tasks that were mine, no longer with any sense of the triviality of them or with the notion that I might have been better employed on larger things. But for a long time, employed on this common round, nothing more happened: I just went on doing them, believing that they were part of a great whole, but not, I may say, energetically conscious of it. Then one day, as I told you, I saw God shining from the petroleum-tins and the shelves of the store."

There are certain moments in one's life that are imperishably photographed on the mind, and will

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live there unblurred and unfaded till the end. I think the reason for this (when so much that seemed important at the time, constantly fades from one's memory) is that in some way, great or small, they mark the advent of a new perception, and this sense of enlightenment gives them their everlasting quality. They are thus more commonly associated with childish days, when discoveries are of more frequent occurrence than is the case in later years. Certainly now the smell of lilac is hugely significant to me because of that one moment when, at the exploring age of five, I was first consciously aware of it. It was time to go to bed, though the sunlight still lay level across the garden where we children played, and the nurse who had come to fetch us in, relented, and gave us five minutes' grace, the granting of which at that moment seemed to endow one with all that was really desirable in life. Simultaneously the evening breeze disentangled the web of fragrance from the lilac bush near which I stood, and cast it over me, so that, imperishable to this day, the scent of it is mixed up in my mind with a mood of ecstatic happiness. What went before that, what had been the history of the afternoon, or what was the history of the days that followed, has quite gone, but vignetted for ever for me is the smell of the lilac bush and the rapture of five minutes more play. The first conscious sight of the sea, lying grey and quiet beneath a low sky, is another such picture, and another such, I am sure, will be the sight of Francis's face as he stood there

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facing westwards, with the glow of molten clouds on it, and with the wind just stirring his hair, as he stood bare-headed, and spoke those last words. The memory of our walk that day may grow dim, much may get blurred and indistinct in my mind, but his face then, alight with joy, not solemn joy at all, but sheer human happiness, will live to me in the manner of the lilac-scent, and the first sight of the sea. It was new; never before had I seen so complete an exuberance, so unshadowed a bliss.

We returned to town next morning. Two days later he rejoined his regiment.

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DECEMBER, 1915.

DUTY under a somewhat threadbare disguise of pleasure has the upper hand just now, in this energetic city, and we spend a large number of our afternoons each week seated in half-guinea and guinea stalls, and watch delightful entertainments at theatres or listen to concerts at private houses, got up for the benefit of some most deserving charity, and for the really opulent there are seats at three or five guineas. These entertainments are as delightful as they are long, and we have an opportunity two or three times a week of seeing the greater part of our prominent actors and actresses, and hearing the most accomplished singers and players on all or more than all of the musical instruments known to Nebuchadnezzar pour forth a practically endless stream of melody. Certainly it is a great pleasure to hear these delightful things, but, as I have said, it is really duty that prompts us to live for pleasure, for the pleasure, by incessant wear, is getting a little thin. We should not dream of spending so much on seats in theatres if we were not contributing to a cause. Often tea of the most elaborate and substantial style is thrown in, and thus our bodies as well as our minds are sumptuously catered for. Soon, I suppose, when we have once

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freed our minds from the nightmare of Zeppelins, we shall have these entertainments in the evening with dinner thrown in. The only little drawback connected with them is concerned with the matter of tickets. Naturally you do not want to go alone, and in consequence, when you are asked to take tickets you take two guinea ones if you are rich, and if not two half-guinea ones. There is no question of refusing. You have got to. But it is not so easy as you would imagine to get somebody to go with you to these perpetual feasts of histrionic and vocal talent, for everyone else has already taken two tickets, and is eagerly hunting for a companion at these entertainments on behalf of funds for Serbians, Russians, French, Italians, Red Cross, eggs for hospitals, smokes for sailors, soup kitchens, disabled horses, bandages, kit-bags, mine-sweepers, cough lozenges for aeroplanists, woollen mufflers, and all the multifarious needs of those who are or have been taking a hand in the fight. Indeed, sometimes I think those entertainments are a little overdone, for a responsible admiral told me the other day that if any more woollen mufflers were sent to the fleet it would assuredly sink, which would be a very disastrous consequence of too ardent a spirit of charity. But till the fleet sinks under the woollies that are poured into it, and the kitchens are so flooded with soup as to be untenable, I suppose we shall continue to take two stalls and wildly hunt about for someone to occupy the second, between the hours of two and seven-thirty. But whether

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there is a theatrical entertainment or not on any particular day, it is sure to be a flag day. You need not buy two flags, though you have been obliged to take two stalls—until you have lost the first one. But it is as essential as breathing to buy one flag, if you propose to go out of doors at all, and on the whole it is wiser to buy your decoration from the first seller that you see. It is your ransom; the payment of this amiable blackmail ensures your unmolested passage through the streets. True, for a time, you can play a very pretty game which consists in crossing the street when you see a flag-seller imminent, and proceeding along the opposite pavement. Soon another flag-seller will be imminent there also, upon the approach of whom you cross back again to your original pavement. But sooner or later you are bound to be caught: a van or an omnibus obstructs the clear view of the other side of the street, and after being heavily splashed with mud from the roadway, you regain the pavement only to find there is another flag-seller who has been in ambush behind the 'bus that has splashed you. If you are urgently in need of exercise you can step back again before encountering the privateer, but you know that sooner or later you will have to buy a flag, and on the whole it is wiser to buy it at once, and take your exercise with an untroubled mind, and a small garish decoration in your buttonhole. The flag-sellers for the most part, are elegant young females, who appear to enjoy this unbridled licence to their pillaging pro-

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pensities, and as long as they enjoy it, I suppose flag-days will go on. But it would be simpler and fairer to add a penny to the income-tax, and divide it in just proportions between these harpy charities. Or, if that is too involuntary a method of providing funds for admirable objects, I should suggest that every seller of flags, should, in return for the privilege of helping in such good causes, start her own collection-box with the donation of one sovereign from herself. Then the beleaguered foot-passenger would feel that he was giving to one who had the cause for which she worked really at heart.

Just as patriotism has become a feature in the streets, so the same motif has made its appearance in the realms of art, and at these entertainments of which I have spoken, there has sprung up a new form of dramatic and topical representation. Sometimes it takes the form of a skit, and the light side of committees is humorously put before us, but more often the author, with a deadlier and more serious aim, shows us in symbolical form the Sublimity of Patriotism. Somehow these elevating dramas make me blush. I am not ashamed of being patriotic, but I cannot bear to see patriotism set to slow music in front of the footlights, and in the presence of those blue-coated men with crutches or arms in slings. The general audience feel it too, and as the curtain goes up for the patriotic sketch, an uncomfortable fidgety silence invariably settles down on

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the house. The manner of the drama is usually somewhat in the following style:

Britannia, in scarlet with a gold crown, is seated in the centre of the stage, and on each side of her is a row of typical female figures, whom she addresses collectively as "Sisters" or "Children." In a few rhyming lines she gives vent to some noble sentiments about the war, and calls on each in turn to express her opinion. As these assembled females represent Faith, Hope, Belgium, Mother, Wife, Sweetheart, Serbia, Child, Justice, Mercy, Russia, Victory and Peace, a very pleasant variety of sentiments is expressed. Faith brandishes a sword with an ingenious arrangement by which electric lights spring out along the blade, and expresses complete confidence in the righteousness of the cause for which she unsheathed it. Hope looks forward to a bright dawn, and fixes her eyes dreamily on the Royal Box. Belgium, giving way to very proper emotion when she mentions Namur (rhyming to "poor"), sinks back on her chair, and Britannia, dismounting from her throne, lays a hand on her shoulder and kisses her hair. She then gives Belgium into the care of Faith, and dashing away a tear, resumes her throne, and asks Mother what she has to say. Mother and Wife then stand hand in hand and assure Britannia that they have sent their son and husband to the war because it was their duty to send him and his to go. Mother knows the righteousness of the cause. Faith crosses, presses the electric light, and with illuminated sword in hand,

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kisses Mother. Mother kisses Faith. Wife knows it too, and looks forward to the bright dawn of which Hope has spoken (Hope crosses and embraces Wife: momentary Tableau, accompanied on the orchestra by "Land of Hope and Glory." Britannia rises and bows to the audience).

When the applause has subsided, they resume, and Britannia calls on Sweetheart. Sweetheart trips out into the front of the stage, and goes through a little pantomime alone, but it is at once apparent that in her imagination there is a male figure there. There are little embracings: she promises the unseen figure not to cry any more, but to write to him (B.E.F.) every day.

Britannia calls her, "Brave girl."

Britannia (pointing to Child, with a voice already beginning to break with emotion): "And you, my little one?"

Long pause.

Child (in a high treble): "Oh, Mrs. Britannia, do let Daddy come home soon!" (Pause.) "Won't he come home soon, Mrs. Britannia?"

Britannia (choking): "My little one!" (Sobs.) "My little one!"

(Faith, Hope, Mother, etc., all turn aside and hide their faces, with convulsive movements of their shoulders. Eventually Hope looks firmly up at the Royal Box, and a loud click is heard as Faith tries to light the electric sword. As it is out of order, she merely holds it up. This is the cue for the play to proceed.)

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Justice is rather fierce, and as she speaks about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, Britannia rises and with a majestic look sets her teeth and flashes her eyes. Mercy intervenes, telling Justice that they are sisters, Justice acknowledges the soft impeachment, and hides her head on Mercy's shoulder, who reminds her that the quality of Mercy is twice blest, which is very pleasant for her as she *is* Mercy.

Rolls of drum in the orchestra punctuate what Victory has to say, which is just as easily described as imagined, but is scarcely worth description. Then a soft smile irradiates Britannia's face, and she says:

> "And now that Victory's won I call
> The fairest sister of you all."

On which Peace advances and crowns Britannia with a green wreath, and a small stuffed pigeon descends from above Britannia's head and hovers. The curtain descends slowly to long soft chords on the orchestra. The applause of relief sounds faintly from various quarters of the house. The curtain instantly ascends again and shows the same picture. It goes up and down five or six times. Then it parts, and Britannia comes out and bows to the house. She smiles at someone behind the curtain, and extends her hand. A small man in a frock coat and an expression of abject misery comes out and clutches it. The audience come to the conclusion that he must be the author, and with the amiable

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idea of putting him out of his misery applaud again. On which Britannia advances a little to the left and again beckons behind the curtain. On which Child runs out, and (as previously instructed) after an alarmed survey of the house, hides its little face in the ample folds of Britannia's gown. Murmurs of sympathy. Britannia (who has a way with her) encourages the infant (who has done this fifty times before, and is really as brazen as brass) and points to the Royal Box. Child drops curtsy, amid more applause. Faith, Hope, Mother, Wife, History, Geography, Belgium, Peace, Mathematics, Victory, Suicide, Phlebotomy, Green Grocery and any other symbolical figures that there may be, join the group one by one. They all bow, the audience continues applauding: Faith (having mastered the unruly mechanism) lights up her sword. Peace holds aloft the Dove. Belgium's hair falls down. . . .

The lights go up in the theatre, and guinea stall turns to guinea stall with a sigh.

"Oh, George Robey next," she says. "I hope he'll play golf."

Now I want to make my position clear. I think it wonderfully kind of all these eminent ladies to spend all this time and trouble in giving us this patriotic sketch. I think it wonderfully clever of the gentleman who wrote it to have made it all up, and thought of all those rhymes. I think every single sentiment expressed in his drama to be absolutely unexceptionable, and, as we hear from the

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pulpit, "True in the best sense of the word," without even inquiring what that cryptic utterance means. But there seems to me to be two weighty objections to the whole affair: it is all utterly devoid of the sense of humour and of the sense of decency. You may say that when treating of such deeply-felt matters as Faith and Victory and Mother and Child, a sense of humour would be out of place. I do not agree: it is the absence of the sense of humour that causes it to be so ridiculous. As for the propriety of presenting such things on the stage, I can only say that the Lord Chamberlain ought never to have allowed this and fifty other such pieces to appear, on grounds of indecent exposure. To present under such ruthless imagery the secret and holiest feelings of the heart is much worse than allowing people to appear with no clothes on. It is all true, too: there is its crowning horror. It is just because it is so sacredly true that it is totally unfit for public production. There are things you can't even talk about . . . and they are just these things that the author of this abomination has put into the mouths of these eminent actresses. And the bowings and the scrapings, and the return of the actors, all smiles to their friends in the audience. . . . Oh, swiftly come, George Robey, and let us forget about it!

In this blear-eyed December, which, with its stuffy dark days and absence of sunshine, seems like some drowsy dormouse faintly conscious of being awake, and desiring only to be allowed to go to sleep again,

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there is an immense amount of activity going on. As in those ample entertainments for the sake of something, there is exhibited on the part of actors, authors and audience an intense desire to be doing something, so in the general life of the country there is a sense of being busy, being strenuous, doing work of some sort in order to experience the narcotic influence of occupation. The country is unhappy, and since England is a very practical country, it is stifling its spiritual unhappiness by being busy. It does things to prevent its thinking about things, and though it does very foolish things, it shows its common-sense in doing something rather than encourage its unhappiness by brooding over it. Herein, it shows its inherent vitality: were it less vital it would abandon itself to gloomy reflection. But it does not: it is tremendously busy, and so with set purpose deprives itself of the tendency to think. That is not very difficult, for, as a nation, we cannot be considered good at thinking.

Now considering that all action of whatever kind is the direct result of thought, it would seem at first sight, when we observe the amazing activities of most people, that these same people must think a great deal. But as a matter of fact, most people, so far from thinking a great deal, hardly think at all, and the greater part of their consistent activity is the result of mere habit. The baby, for instance, who is learning to walk, or the girl who is learning to knit, think immensely and absorbedly about these locomotive and involved accomplishments, just be-

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cause they have not yet formed the habit of them. But a few years later, the baby who has become a man will give no thought at all to the act of walking and, indeed, to walk (the feat which once so engaged his mind), now sets his mind free to think, and he finds that problems which require to be thought out are assisted to their solution by the act that once required so much attention: similarly the grown-up woman often really talks and attends better to other things when she is engaged in knitting. The accomplishment has soaked in through the conscious to the sub-conscious self, and demands no direction from the practical mind.

It is on the lines of this analogy that we must explain the fact that many very active people are almost incapable of sustained or coherent thought. Many of their activities are matters of habit; they order dinner or look at a picture exhibition or argue about the war with no more thought than the man who walks or the woman who knits. They can be voluble about post-impressionism because at one time they acquired the habit of talking about it, and to do so now requires no more exercise of the reflective or critical qualities than does the ordering of a beef-steak pudding. Or, if they argue about the war, most people have no original ideas of any kind on the subject: they mix round, as in an omelette, certain facts they have seen in the official telegrams, with certain reflections they have read in the leaders of their papers, and serve up, hot or cold,

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as their fancy dictates. But they do not think about it.

Thought, in fact, not merely abstract thought, but a far less difficult variety, namely, definite coherent thought about concrete things, is an extremely rare accomplishment among grown up people. We are often told that it is infinitely harder to learn anything when we are of mature age than when we are young, and this is quite true, the reason for it being that we now find it more difficult to think since we have so long relied on muddling along under the direction of habit. And even the people who think they think are not in most cases the real owners of their thoughts. They borrow their thoughts, as from a circulating library, and instead of owning them, return them slightly damaged at the end of a week or two, and borrow some more. They do not think for themselves: they stir about the stale thoughts of others and offer their insipid porridge as a home-industry.

This second-hand method of thinking is strangely characteristic of our race, in contradistinction to French and German methods of thought, and is admirably illustrated by the anecdote concerning the camel. An Englishman, a Frenchman and a German were bidden to write an essay on that melancholy beast, deriving their authorities from where they chose. The Englishman studied books of natural history at the British Museum, and when he had written an essay founded on them, went and shot a camel. The Frenchman took his hat and

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stick and went to the *Jardin des Plantes,* where he looked at a real camel, and subsequently had a ride or two on its back. But the German did none of these things: he consulted no authority, he looked at no camel, but shutting himself up in his study, he constructed one from his inner consciousness.

Now whether this offspring of mentality was like a real camel or not, history does not tell us. Probably it was not, any more than the new map of Europe planned by Prussian militarism will prove like the map of Europe as it will appear in the atlases published, let us say, in 1918. But even if the German camel was totally unrecognizable as such, its constructor had shown himself capable of entering on a higher plane of thought than is intelligible to the ordinary Englishman. The German, in fact, as we are beginning to learn, is able to sit down and think, and out of pure thought to build up an image. The English are excellent learners, quick to assimilate and apply what others have thought out, the French are vivid and keen observers, but neither have the power of sustained internal thought which characterizes the Teuton, who incidentally is quite the equal of the Englishman at learning and of the Frenchman at observation. The German, for instance, thought out the doctrine of submarine warfare, and to our grievous cost applied it to our shipping. Similarly they thought out the doctrine of trench warfare, supplemented by gas, then the French, with their marvellously quick

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powers of observation, saw and comprehended and applied. In fact, the two great German inventions conceived by them, and originally used by them, have been adopted and brought to a higher pitch of perfection by their adversaries. But if only any of our allied nations could pick up from them the power of concentrated and imaginative thought, for the root of the matter is imagination! We proverbially muddle through, and when occasion arises, by dint of a certain stubbornness and admirable stolidity, though pommelled and buffeted, eventually learn by experience a successful mode of resistance. But constitutionally, we appear incapable of initiating ideas. We cannot imagine an occasion, but can only meet the occasion when somebody else imagines it.

Of all the disappointments of this year this is the root. We cannot invent: we can only counter. We have not the power of constructive imagination, which is the mother and father of original actions. But when our adversaries indulge in original actions, we can (on occasion) think out an answer to them which is perfectly effective. We can resist and we can hit back when we are hit, but at present we have not shown that we are capable of imagining and dealing the first blow. Perhaps this may come, for it goes without saying that we were notoriously unready at the beginning of the war, and had our hands full and overfull with countering the blows that were rained on us. We were on the defensive and could barely maintain the defence, and could

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not possibly have collected that coiled force which is necessary for any offensive movement. But if after sixteen months of war we do not begin to show signs of it, it is reasonable to wonder whether the cause of this is not so much that we lack the battering power, but that our statesmen and our generals lack the imagination out of which original plans are made. True, there have been two original schemes, namely, that of forcing the Dardanelles and capturing Bagdad, and if these show the quality of our originality, perhaps we are better without it. . . .

It is natural that the stress of war should have brought out the deep-rooted, inherent qualities of the nations engaged, and those qualities are just those that strike you first in a man of whatever nationality. When you know him a little better, you think you detect all sorts of other qualities, but when you come really to know him—singly or collectively—he is usually just such as you first thought him to be. Indeed, it is as Francis said about the orange: the rind has the savour of the fruit within, between the two there is a layer of soft, pulpy stuff. But when you get through that, the man, the essential person is like the taste of the rind. This has been immensely true with regard to the war. On the surface the French strike anyone who comes in contact with them as full of admirable fervour: there is the strong, sharp odour about them, there is a savour that penetrates. Then you get to know them just a little better, and you find a woolly and

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casual touch about them, which you, in your ignorance born out of a little knowledge, take to be the real spirit of the French. But when intimate acquaintance, or the stripping of the surface takes place, how you must alter your estimate again, going back to your first impression. You meet the fervour, the strong sharp odour again, and it goes into the heart of the nation. The Frenchman is apt on first acquaintance to seem too genuine, too patriotically French to be real. But when you get within, when the stress of war has revealed the nation and shown the strong beating of its heart, how the fervour and the intensity of savour persist! What you thought was superficial you find to be the quality that dwells in the innermost. He will easily talk about *La France* and *La gloire* when you first get acquainted with him, but when he stands revealed you find that he talks about it easily because it is the spring and source of his being.

The same holds with the German. When first you get speaking-acquaintance with a German, you consider him brutal and beery and coarse and loud-tongued. You penetrate a little further, and find him watching by the Rhine and musical and philosophical, a peaceful, aloof dreamer. Such, at any rate, was the experience of Lord Haldane. But when the pulpy, stringy layer is stripped off, when the stress of war makes penetration into his real self, you find him again to be as you first thought him, coarse and brutal and clamant, the most overweening individual in all creation. Both with the

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French and the German you revised your first impressions when you thought you began to know him, only to find when the real man is revealed that he is as you first thought him. And though it is the hardest thing in the world for anyone to form even an approximately true estimate of the race to which he belongs, I think that the same holds of the English. They are at heart very much what they appear to be on the surface, blundering but tenacious, slow to move, but difficult when once on the move to stop. But really, when I try to think what the English are like, I find I can form no conclusion about them, simply because I am of them.

I have just had a long letter from Francis, a letter radiant with internal happiness. The exterior facts of life cannot much contribute to that, for the place where he now is consists, so he tells me, entirely of bare hillside, lined with shallow trenches, bullets and swarms of drowsy flies. He hints in a cryptic manner his belief that he will not remain there very long, leaving me to make any conjecture I please. But in the lines and between them I read, as I said, a radiance of happiness. He knows, with a strength that throttles all qualms of the flesh, that does not, indeed, allow them to exist at all, the bright shining of the light invisible, that diffused illumination in which no shadow can be cast. And as in that walk we had on the downs, the knowledge fills him not only with inward bliss, but with intense physical enjoyment, so that he can be humorous over the

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horrors of existence on that damned promontory. He is genuinely amused: for nobody was ever such a poor hand at dissimulation as Francis. He finds things to enjoy in that hell; more than that, he finds that hell enjoyable: his letter breathed that serenity of well-being which is the least imitable thing in the world.

Meantime, he wants the news of everyday happenings, "without any serious reflections, or the internal stomach-ache of pessimists." These rather pointed remarks refer, I am afraid, to my last letter to him, to which he does not otherwise allude. He quotes Mr. Longfellow's best-known poem (I am afraid also) in the spirit of mockery, and says: "'Life is real, life is earnest,' and if you doubt it, come out to Suvla Bay and see. We are damned earnest out here, and I haven't seen anybody who doubts that Life is extremely real: so are the flies. What I want to know is the little rotten jokes and nonsense, the things you talk about when you don't think what you are talking about. Here's one: the other day I was opening a tin of potted meat, and a bit of shrapnel came and took the tin clean out of my hand. It didn't touch me; it simply whisked it neatly away. Another inch and my hand would have gone with it. But I hope you don't think I gave thanks for the lucky escape I had had. Not a bit: I was merely furious at losing the potted meat. It lay outside the trench (a trench out here is a tea-spoonful of earth and pebbles which you pile up in front of you, and then hide yourself be-

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hind it), and I spent the whole of the afternoon in casting for it, with a hook on a piece of string. I was much more interested in that than in the military operations. I wanted my potted meat, which I think you sent me. Well, what I should like you to write to me about, is the things that the part of me which wanted the potted meat would like to hear about. Patriotism and principles be blowed, bless them! That's all taken for granted—'granted, I'm sure,' as the kitchen-maid said.

"FRANCIS.

"P.S.—You alluded to a grey parrot, in one letter. For God's sake, tell me about the grey parrot. You just mentioned a grey parrot, and then no more. Grey parrot is what I want, and your cat, and all the little, rotten things that are so tremendously important. Write me a grey parrot letter."

Well, the grey parrot is rather interesting . . . and her name is Matilda, and if you want to know why she is Matilda, you have only got to look at her. If words have any suggestiveness to your mind, if there is to you any magic about them, or if they, unbidden, conjure up images, I should not be surprised if the word "Matilda" connoted to you a grey parrot. It would be more surprising if, when you become acquainted with my grey parrot, you did not become aware that she *was* Matilda. I don't see how you can get away from the fact that she must, in the essentials of her nature, be Matilda. Presently you will see what Matilda-ism is: when

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it is stated, you will know that you knew it all along, but didn't know you knew it. The same sort of thing happened to somebody, when he became aware that all his life he had been writing prose. And very good prose it was. . . . Here, then, begins the introduction to Matilda-ism, in general terms to be applied later.

Matilda-ism

We all of us know (even the most consistent of us) those baffling instincts which lead us to act in manners incompatible with each other, simultaneously. That is not so puzzling as it sounds (nor sounds quite as ungrammatical as it is), and an instance will clarify the principle. For who does not understand and in measure sympathize with the careful housewife who embarks on a two-shilling taxicab expedition in order to purchase some small household commodity at sixpence less than she could have bought it for across the road? The motive of her expedition is economy, and therefore she lashes out into bewildering expenditure in order to achieve it. Economy, in fact, is the direct cause of her indulging in totally unnecessary expenditure. She ties herself to the stake with one hand, ready to be burned for the sake of her faith, and offers incense to the heathen gods with the other.

It is this strain of self-contradictory conduct that I unhesitatingly label Matilda-ism, for, as far as I am aware, there is no other succinct term in the

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English language which sums up and expresses it. (Besides, it is characteristic of my grey parrot, for as you shall presently see, this is what Matilda does. You cannot explain this incompatibility of action and principle otherwise: it is not vacillation, it is not infirmity of purpose, for the economical housewife is one mass of purpose and her motive is as pure as Parsifal. Simply in pursuance of her economical design, she rushes into expense. Nor is it the sign of a weak intellect, for Matilda's grasp of a subject is, like Mrs. Micawber's, inferior to none, and yet Matilda is the great example of the quality which takes its name from her. She does not spare thought and industry, perhaps, if anything, she thinks too much, which may account for the inadequacy of her plumage. She has been ill, too, lately, which perhaps makes her plumage worse, for she has been suffering from some obscure affection of the brain. But since her illness her Matildaism has been more marked than ever, and I prefer to think that it is Thought which has accounted both for the illness and her abnormal moultings. She had that rare disease, beloved of novelists, called Brain-fever. People's hair, we are told, falls out after brain-fever, and so did Matilda's feathers. But I am sure that Matilda would sooner go naked, than cease to think.

Unlike most women, Matilda does not care about her clothes, and unlike most birds, she does not scoop and preen herself after breakfast. She gives one shake, and then settles down to her studies,

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which consist in observing, with a scornful wonder, all that goes on round her. When first she came here, she was in no hurry to draw conclusions, or commit herself hastily to irrevocable words, for she sat and waited without speech for some six weeks, until I thought she was either dumb or had nothing to say. Then, unlike Mr. Asquith, she ceased to wait and see, and began calling the kitchen-maid (Mabel) in a voice so like the cook's, that that deluded young lady came running from the scullery into the kitchen, to find no cook there at all, at all, but only a grey parrot, that sat with stony, half-closed eyes on her perch. Then, as she went out again, believing that some discarnate intelligence had spoken to her, Matilda laughed at her in a rude, hoarse voice that was precisely like the milkman's, mewed like the cat, and said "Cuckoo" a number of times. (This she had learned last spring in the country, and was unaware that there were no cuckoos in London ever, or even in the country in November.) Matilda, in fact, with her powerful intellect and her awful memory, had been taking stock of everybody, and not telling anybody about it. Now that it was well within her power to deal with every situation that could possibly arise in a mocking manner, she decided to begin talking and taking an active part, that of the critic, in life. Simultaneously, she began to reveal what Matilda-ism was. At this period, since she was too accomplished to be limited to the kitchen, I took her upstairs. I thought she would meet more people

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there, and enlarge, if possible, a mind that was already vast.

Her first definite elucidation of Matilda-ism was to make love in the most abandoned manner to the green parrot. She wooed him in the style that the Bishop of L-nd-n so rightly deprecates, with loud Cockney whistles and love-lorn eyes. Of course Joey seemed to like that, and their cages were moved close together, in the hope that eventually they would make a match of it, and that most remarkable babies would chip the shells of their eggs. Matilda continued to encourage him, and one day, when their cages were now quite close to each other, the green gentleman, trembling with excitement, put out a horned claw, and introduced it into Matilda's cage. On which Matilda screamed at the top of her voice and bit it viciously. I thought at the time that this was only an exhibition of the eternal feminine, which encourages a man, and then is offended and indignant when he makes the natural response to her invitations, but in the light of subsequent events, I believe it to have been Matilda-ism. She was not being a flirt, simply, while she adored, she hated also. It was Matilda, you see: all the time it was Matilda waiting to be classified.

Matilda knew perfectly well what a cat says: she knew, too, that a cat is called "Puss," and, putting two and two together, she always said "Meaow" when you went to her cage and said "Puss." This is synthetic reasoning, like that of the best philosophers, and, all the world over, is taken as a mark

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of the highest intelligence. Similarly, she knew that my dog is called Taffy, and (by a converse process inaccessible to any but the finest minds) if you went to her cage and said "Bow-ow-ow," she responded with the neatness of a versicle, "Taffy, Taffy, Taffy." But—and this is Matilda-ism—when Taffy came near her cage she invariably mewed to him, and when a cat came near her cage, she barked. She did not confuse them; Matilda's brain shines illustriously above the clouds of muddle. She preferred to abandon synthetic reasoning, and create Matilda-ism.

I must insist on this, for all the evidence goes to confirm it. For instance, if you pull a handkerchief from your pocket, she makes rude noises which cannot fail to remind you of the blowing of a nose oppressed by catarrh. Also, when Mabel left, she learned the name of the new kitchen-maid at once, and never made mistakes about it. But as she increased in years and wisdom, her ineradicable leanings towards Matilda-ism increased also.

Then came the crisis in her life, the brain-fever to which I have alluded. She had a fit, and for five or six days was seriously ill in the spare-room, set high above the noises of the street, where no exciting sounds could reach her. But she recovered, and her recovery was held to be complete when from the spare-room where she had undergone her rest-cure, a stream of polyglot noises one morning issued forth. I took her back into my sitting-room again, and reminded her of the European War by

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saying, "Gott strafe the Kaiser." I thought this would bring her into touch with the world of to-day again, but for a long time she remained perfectly silent. But when I had said, "Gott strafe the Kaiser" two or three hundred times, she burst into speech with a loud preliminary scream.

"Gott strafe Polly's head," she cried. "Gott save the King! Gott save the Kaiser! Gott scratch Polly's head. Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Cuckoo! Cuckoo. Puss, Puss, Puss! Bow-ow-ow! . . ." And the poor demented bird laughed in hoarse ecstasy, at having got in touch with synthetic reasoning again!

Matilda-ism took control of all her thoughts. If a tea-cup was presented to her notice, she blew her nose loudly, though I cannot believe that she had ever seen a tea-cup used as a handkerchief. When Joey was put near her cage again she called him Taffy. She barked at the kitchen-maid, and mewed at the cook, and called the cat Mabel. All her correlations had gone wrong in that attack of brain-fever, and though she had shown signs of Matilda-ism before, I never thought it would come to this. She was a voluble mass of contradictory and irreconcilable propositions.

All this I wrote to Francis, since he desired domestic and ridiculous information, but when the letter was sealed and dispatched, I could not help thinking that Matilda, real as she is, is chiefly a parable. It is impossible, in fact, not to recollect that King Constantine of Greece was very ill last

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spring (like Matilda), and subsequently (i) invited the Allies to land at Salonica, and (ii) turned M. Venizelos out of office. It all looks traitorous, but perhaps it is mere Matilda-ism. But I am not sure that it would not be better for him to have some more brain-fever, and have done with it.

* * * * * *

A postscript must be added. I took Matilda into the country, when I went there for a few days last week. One morning she saw a ferret being taken out of a bag, and instantly sang, "Pop goes the Weasel." I think that shows a turn for the better, some slight power of sane synthesis lurks in the melody, for a ferret is a sort of weasel. I am naturally optimistic, and cannot help wondering whether a change of air might not produce a similar amelioration in the case of King Constantine. Russia, for instance. . . .

I had intended to keep these annals of Matilda detached from the war, but it has wound its way in again, as King Charles's head invaded the chronicles of Mr. Dick. There is no getting away from it: if you light a cigarette, you think of Turkey and the expedition to the Dardanelles; if you drink a glass of wine, you think of the trenches dug through the vineyards of France. And yet, how little, actually, has the war entered into the vital parts of the mass of English people. To large numbers, reckoned by thousands, it has made unhealable wounds, but into larger numbers, reckoned by millions, no prick of

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the sword has really penetrated. I wonder when some kind of awakening will come, when to the endless dormitories of drowsy sleepers, some smell of the burning, some sound of the flaming beams above their heads and below them will pierce their dreams. I pray God that on that day there will be no terrified plucking from sleep into realities vastly more portentous than any nightmare, but an awakening from sloth into an ordered energy.

But up till now, a profound slumber, or at the most a slumber with coloured dreams, has possessed the spirit of the nation. Occasionally some sleeper, roused by the glare that burns sombrely on the placid night of normal human existence, has awoke and has screamed out words of Pythian warning. But his troubled awakening has but annoyed the myriads of other sleepers. One has growled out, "Oh, for God's sake, go to sleep again: there's the Navy;" another has murmured, "It's unpatriotic to be pessimistic;" a third has whispered, "God always permits us to muddle through." Sometimes the yell has startled another into futile whimperings, but then some retired Colonel, who writes for the papers, like a soft-slippered nurse, pads up to his bedside, and says, "Go to sleep again, dearie, I'm here," and the whimpering ceases, and the nurse pulls down the blind to keep the glare out of the eyes of the sleeper. Occasionally one of them makes such a to-do that an attendant hurries downstairs to fetch a member of the Government from the room where they are having such a pleasant chat over their wine,

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and he is given a glass of port, and asked to come downstairs in his dressing-gown and join the amusing supper-party. Sometimes he goes, sometimes he drinks his wine and prefers to go to sleep again instead. I don't know what would happen if he refused to go downstairs, and said he would go on screaming. But no one at present contemplates such an upsetting contingency. Besides, there is always the Censor, Auntie Censor, who can be stern when sternness is really wanted, and spank any obstreperous screamer with a ruthless blue pencil.

Everyone knows that particular (and disagreeable) climatic condition, when, during a frost, thaw becomes imminent. It may still be freezing, but there is something in the air which tells those who are susceptible to change just a little before change arrives that a thaw is approaching. The sensation cannot be accounted for by the thermometer, which still registers a degree or two of frost, but to those who have this weather prescience, it is quite unmistakable. Similarly in affairs not appealing to the merely physical sense, it sometimes happens that people are aware of a coming event implying change, before there is any real reason to justify their belief. This is so common a phenomenon that it has even been crystallized into an awkwardly-worded proverb which informs us that coming events cast their shadow before (meaning light), but to adopt the current phrase, there has lately been a great deal of shadow projected from the Dardanelles, and it is

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now a matter of general belief that that ill-planned, ill-executed expedition is about to be recalled, and that all the eager blood shed there will now prove to have been poured out over an enterprise that shall be abandoned as unrealizable. For many months now hearts have been sick with deferred hope, eyes dim with watching for the dawn that never broke, and it seems probable that "Too late" is to be scrawled in red over another abortive adventure, now to be filed away among failures under the appropriate letter D. It is idle to attempt to see any bright lining to the cloud which hangs over that accursed peninsula: all that can be hoped is that the gallant souls who still hold a corner of it, despite the misadventures, the miscalculations, the mismanagement that have for months punctuated heroism with halts and full stops written in crimson, will be bought off without the crowning record of some huge disaster.

Christmas approaches, and the furnaces of the world-war are being stoked up to burn with a more hideous intensity, while village choirs practise their hymns and anthems about peace on earth, good will towards men. Every decent Christian Englishman (*pace* the pacifists) believes in the prime importance of killing as many Germans as possible, and yet no decent Christian Englishman will somehow fail to endorse with a genuine signature the message of the angelic host, even though his fingers itch for the evening paper, which he hopes contains some news

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of successful slaughter. That sounds like another instance of Matilda-ism, and mere discussion, as confined to the narrow sphere of rational argument, might easily leave the defender of such an attitude with not a leg to stand upon. But all the time (for argument at best can only prove what is not worth explaining) he will know at heart that his position has not been shaken by the apparent refutation, and he will give you his word (than which there is nothing greater and nothing less) that his contention, logically indefensible, is also unassailable. He can't explain, and it is better not to try. But he knows how it feels, which is more vital than knowing how to account for it. Logic and Euclid are not, after all, irrefutable, though they may be, by human reason, the final guides to human conduct.

Everything cannot be referred to reason as to a supreme arbiter. Reason will lead you a long way across the plain, but beyond the plain there is, like a row of visionary blue mountains, a range of highland which is the abode of the riddles, the questions, the inconsistencies which are quite outside the level lands of reason. No one can tell why the Omnipotent Beneficence (some people hate to see the word God) ever allowed cancer and malarial mosquitoes and Prussian militarism to establish themselves so firmly on the earth which is the Lord's. It is impossible to explain this away, and unless you argue from the fact of their undoubted existence that there is no such thing as the Omnipotent Beneficence, and become that very silly thing called an

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atheist, the best thing you can do (collectively) is to look for the germs of cancer with a view to their destruction, cover with paraffin the breeding places of the mosquito, and help, if you have the good fortune still to be useful, in the extermination of Prussian militarism. All these three things are, very possibly, manifestations of the devil, and even if they are not (improbable as it sounds), they are so like manifestations of the devil, that we are justified in mistaking them for such. I am quite convinced of that, and am impervious to any argument about it. I "am in love and charity" (in my microscopic degree) "with my neighbours," but that would not prevent me killing a German with all the good will in the world, if I was put in the firing line, any more than it would prevent me squashing a malaria-carrying mosquito with my Prayer Book. And if I could sing (which I can't) I would bellow "Peace on earth, good will towards men," at the top of my voice, even while I was poising the Prayer Book or drawing a bead on the Prussians. "Inconsistent." I daresay, but why be consistent? Besides, deep down, I know it is consistent.

Yet, though we all recognize the essential consistency of this apparent inconsistency, how we long, as with the yearning for morning through the dark hours of pain, for the time when such complication of instinct will have vanished. Twelve leaden months have dropped sullenly, one by one, into the well of time, salt with human tears, and those who were optimistic a year ago, believing that when

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Christmas next came round, Europe would have recovered from this madness of bloodshed, are less confident in their outlook for another Christmas. But few, I think, if a stroke of the pen could give back to the world that menacing tranquillity which preceded the war, would put their name to so craven a document. Now that we know what those faint and distant flashes of lightning meant in the years that saw us all sunk in the lethargy of opulent prosperity, now that we know what those veiled drowsy murmurs of thunder from Central Europe portended, we would not take in exchange for the days of direst peril, the false security that preceded them. Even as America now is drunk with dollars, so that no massacre of her citizens on the high seas will reduce her from the attitude of being too proud to fight, to the humbler office of resenting crimes that send her defenceless citizens without warning to the bottomless depths of the Atlantic, so we, with our self-sufficiency and our traditional sense of supremacy, could not be bothered to listen to the warnings of the approaching storm till with hail of fire it burst on us. Then, it is true, we ceased to dream, but ever since our kind nurses have done their best to cozen back those inert hours. "I'm sitting up, dearie," they say. "Just wait and see."

* * * * * *

And at this point I will again pass over a year, that comprises the war events of 1916. In the spring the great German attack against Verdun opened, and for months the French stood steadfast,

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until that hail of hammer blows exhausted itself. Early in June was fought the naval battle of Jutland, announced by the German Press as so stupendous a victory, that for the rest of the year their fleet sheltered in Kiel, presumably because they had destroyed the British naval supremacy for ever. In August came the fall of Gorizia, and next month the entry of Rumania into the war, and a disastrous campaign followed. In Greece King Constantine continued his treacherous manœuvres, but failed to exhaust the patience of the Allies. In December, lastly, came the bombastic announcement that the invincible and victorious Germany was willing from motives of magnanimous humanity, to grant peace to the crushed and trampled Allies, who had dared to dispute the might of her God-given destiny. A suitable reply was returned.

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JANUARY, 1917.

It is a year since last I wrote anything in this book, and the year has passed with such speed that I can scarcely believe that the ink of December is dry. Nothing makes time slide away so fast as regular monotonous employment, and not only this year, but the year before that, and five months before that, seem pressed into a moment, dried and flattened. But all the things that happened before that, when in August, 1914, the whole of one's consciousness was changed, is incredibly remote.

The war has made a cleavage across the continuity of life, and while the mind and the conscious self get to be at home in the changed existence, the line of cleavage does not become obliterated, but, on the contrary, appears steeper and more sheer-sided. The edges of the chasm have been covered over with the green growth of habit, of the adjustment that alone renders fresh conditions possible; but further and further away becomes the consciousness that there was once a time in which all Europe was not at war. In those golden years people used to discuss, just as they would discuss ghosts or the approach of a comet, the possibility of a German war, that would lead all Europe into the gate of Hell. But it was discussed theoretically as a subject of polite conversation, when topics that were really of

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interest, like Suffragettes or Home Rule in Ireland, ran dry. You talked about the comet, Halley's comet, that was going to destroy the world, and then you talked about a European war, that was going to destroy the world. And then you played the guessing game. . . .It was all one: just a matter of remote possibilities, based on an idea that you did not believe in. And then it came, not Halley's comet, or a ghost, but the third incredible happening. All that was before has receded into dim ages. You feel that "once upon a time," as in stories you tell to children, there was somebody else masquerading under your own name, and suppose that as by some conjuring trick he was mysteriously identical with you. If you were closely questioned you would allow that in 1913 you did this or that; you wanted something (and perhaps got it); you lived in a house in a certain street, and were popularly supposed to be the same person who lives in that or another house now. You would have to admit these facts, but deep down in yourself you would cling to the secret belief that it was somebody else who, under your name, did the things and lived the life that is supposed to have been yours. A label was attached to you then, which gave your name and address, and you find the same label round your neck still. For the sake of convenience you continue to answer to your name, and, in a manner of speaking, are responsible for the old lease. But all the time you feel that another person wears the label now. A different identity (that is your private

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opinion) inhabits your house. He wears the same (or similar) boots and shoes; he comes when he is called; he has a face that is still recognized by his friends. But though his friends recognize him, you scarcely recognize him yourself. He, who was nurtured in peace, has now but a remote memory of those tranquil years, and thinks they must surely belong to someone else. All he knows now is that since the foundation of the world he has lived in the midst of this grim struggle, which, since the foundation of the world, was as inevitable as the succession of night and day. Before the storm broke, somebody (himself probably, since everyone else says so) knew only that life was a pleasant business (or unpleasant, as the case may be), and that it would go on for a certain number of years, and that then an end would come to it. It was all very jolly, and a railway strike or the rise of the income-tax to, say, one and sixpence in the pound was the sum of the inconvenience ahead. In due time he would get pneumonia or cancer, or be run over by a motor-bus; but all those disheartening possibilities seemed quite remote. Then came the war, and it cleaved his former life from his present life as by an impassable chasm. That being so, he adjusted himself to his present life, and, if he was wise, ceased to waste time over thinking of the "jolly days" which preceded the changed conditions. And if he was wiser still, he did not throw the memory of the "jolly days" away, but put them in a box and locked it up. And if he was wisest of all, he

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said: "I am different, but the eternal things are not different," and went on just as usual.

Indeed, why you do a thing matters far more than what you do. It is easy to conceive of a thoroughly lethargic person who, for mere want of vitality, lives a most respectable life. He has not energy enough—and thereby is less of a man—to commit the usual errors. But the question seriously arises as to whether he had not better be more of a man and commit them. I hasten over this difficult phase, and conceive of him again as more vital than ever, and abstaining from the usual crimes because he is now above them rather than below them. He looks down on them instead of gazing feebly up at them. In actual result, his conduct as regards errors is the same, but who can doubt about the respective values of the respective conducts? The two are poles apart (though in net and tangible result the extremes meet), for no one can say that the man who does not cheat at cards simply from fear of detection has the smallest spiritual affinity with the average person who plays honestly because he is honest.

There is a periodical piece of business in shops and places where they sell things, called stock-taking, and, as its name implies, it consists in the owner going through the goods and seeing what he has got. It is a useful custom, not only in shops, but as applied by ordinary individuals to themselves, and the first day of a New Year is a date commonly in use as the day of internal stock-taking. Very sensible

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people will tell you that the division of one's life into years is a purely arbitrary arrangement, and that December 31st is not severed from January 1st by any more real division than July 3rd is severed from July 4th. But less superbly-constituted minds fall back on these arbitrary arrangements, and with the sense that they are starting again on January 1st, they often have a look round their cupboards and shelves to see what they have in hand. It is a disagreeable sort of business; you will find that your things have got very dusty and dirty, and that probably there is much that should be thrown away and but little that is worth keeping when you run over your record for the past year. But far more important than your actual conduct (as in the case of the two very different gentlemen, neither of whom cheats at cards) is the motive that inspired your conduct. If you are lucky you will perhaps find that you have done a certain number of good-natured things; you may have done some generous ones, but if you are wise, you will, before you let a faint smile of satisfaction steal over your mobile features, consider why you did them. You may have been good-natured out of kindness of heart; all congratulations if it is so; but you may find you have been good-natured out of laziness, in which case I venture to congratulate you again on having brought that fact home to yourself. . . . Indeed, this search for motive rather resembles what happens when you turn over a prettily marked piece of rock lying on the grass. It *may* be all right, but

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sometimes you discover horrible creepy-crawlies below it, which, when disturbed, scud about in a disconcerting manner. Or again (which is more encouraging), you may come across an object—a piece of conduct, that is to say—which really makes you blush to look at it. But possibly, when you turn it over you may find that you really meant rather well, in spite of your deplorable behaviour. Hoard that encouragement, for you will want as much encouragement as you can possibly find if you intend to do your stock-taking honestly; otherwise, you will assuredly not have the spirit to go through with it. And when the stock-taking is done look at the total, which will certainly be very disappointing, without dismay, but with a sanguine hope that you will find a better show next year. Think it over well, and then dismiss the whole thing from your conscious mind. For to dwell too much on your stock-taking, or to take stock too often, produces a paralysing sort of self-consciousness. The man who sets his past failures continually before him is not likely to be much better in the future; while he who contemplates his past successes gets fat and inert with probably quite ill-founded complacency. One of the shrewdest philosophers who ever lived gives very sage advice on this point when he says: "And when he hath done all that is to be done, as far as he knoweth, let him think that he hath done nothing." . . . So we, who have not done one tithe of the things that we knew we ought to have done,

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will certainly have little excuse for thinking we have done something.

Another effect of this last year of tension, besides that of sundering our present lives and consciousness from pre-war days, is that it has made a vast quantity of people very much older. That has advantages and disadvantages, for while there are certainly many very admirable things connected with the sense of youth, there are some which are not so admirable when manifested by those of mature and middle age. It is admirable, for instance, that the middle-aged should have enough vitality to devote themselves to learning the fox-trot, or the bunny-bump, but it is less admirable that they should actually spend their vitality in doing so. The war has taken the wish to bunny-bump out of them, the desire for bunny-bumping has failed, and that has caused them to realize that they are not quite so young as they thought, or as they proposed to be for the next twenty years or so. The sense of middle-age has come upon them as suddenly as the war itself came, and many have found it extremely disconcerting. It is as if they were introduced to a perfect stranger, whom they have to take into their house and live with. They don't like the look of the stranger, nor his manners, nor his habits, and this infernal intruder does not propose, they feel, to make a short visit, but has come to stop with them permanently. He eats and walks and reads with them, and when they wake up at night they

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see his head on their pillow. He seems to them ungracious and angular and forbidding; they dearly long to get away from him, but that is impossible. What, then, are they to do? There is only one thing to be done, to make friends with him without loss of time, and never to regret the vanishing of the jolly days before he came. If they had been wise (hardly anybody is in this respect), they would have made friends with him long before he came as a permanent guest; they would have asked him to lunch, so to speak, on one day, and gone out a walk with him on another, and have thus got accustomed to his ways by degrees. But as they have not done that, they must resign themselves to a period of discomfort now.

Probably they will find that he is much easier to get on with than they think at first. They fancy that they will never be happy again with that old bore always at their elbows, and it is quite true that they never will be happy again in the old way. They must find a new way, and the first step towards that is not to call this guest, middle-age, an old bore, but discover what he can do, and what his good points are. He really has a good many, if you take the trouble to look for them. He has not got the tearing high spirits which they are accustomed to, but he has a certain serenity which is far from disagreeable if you will be at the pains to draw it out. He is not very quick, he has but little of that quality compounded of wit and activity and nonsense which they were wont to consider the basis of

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all social enjoyment; but he has a certain rather kindly humour which gives a twinkle to the eye that sparkles no longer. He has boiled down his experiences, sad and joyful alike, into a sort of broth which is nutritive and palatable, though without bubble. But patience is one of its excellent ingredients, a wholesome herb, which, for all its homeliness, has a very pleasant taste. He can be a very good friend, not liable to take offence, and though his affections are not passionate, they are very sincere.

But if you refuse to see his good points, and will not make friends with him (he will always allow you to do that; it is "up to you"), he will prove himself a very cantankerous old person indeed. He will give you the most annoying reminders of his presence, digging you with his skinny elbow, and making all sorts of sarcastic interruptions when you are talking. You will get to hate him more and more, for he will always be spoiling your pleasure until you are cordially inclined towards him. He will trip you up in the bunny-bump; he will give you aches and pains if you persist in behaving as if you were twenty-five still; he will make you feel very unwell if you choose to eat lobster-salad at sunrise. And you can't get rid of him; the more strenuously you deny his existence, the more indefatigably he will remind you of it. He is quite a good friend, in fact, but a perfectly pernicious enemy. But naturally you will do what you choose about him, as you have always done about everything else. . . .

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To revert to Francis (a far more exhilarating subject than New Year reflections), he was at home for a few days last week. After the Dardanelles expedition was abandoned, he went out to France (after having condescended to accept a commission), where he proceeded at once to earn the V.C. for a deed of ludicrous valour, under a storm of machine-gun bullets, and while on leave received his decoration.

"Of course I like it awfully," was his comment about it; "but, as a matter of fact, I didn't deserve it, because on that particular morning I didn't happen to be frightened. I usually am frightened, and I've deserved the V.C. millions of times, but just when I got it I didn't deserve it. They ought to give the V.C. to fellows who are in the devil of a fright all the time they are doing their job. But that day I wasn't; I had had a delicious breakfast, and felt as calm as Matilda is looking. I don't believe she can speak a word by the way; you made it all up."

I was very much mortified by Matilda's conduct. Ever since Francis's return she had sat in dead silence, though I had taught her to say "Hurrah for the V.C.," and she had repeated it without stopping for several hours the day before he arrived. But the moment she saw him, she looked at him with a cold grey eye and remained absolutely speechless. Of course I did not tell Francis what I had taught her to say, because she might take it into her head to begin to talk at any time, and her con-

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gratulations would not then be a surprise to him. So I held my tongue, and Matilda hers.

Then a most unfortunate incident occurred, for Francis left his decoration in a taxi next day, and though we telephoned to all the taxi-ranks and police-stations in the world, we could hear nothing of it. I don't think I ever saw anyone so furious as he was.

"No one will believe I got it," he shouted. "I meant to wear it day and night, so that even a burglar coming into the house should see it. But now no one will know. I can't go about chanting 'I am a V.C., but I left it in a taxi.' Who would believe such a cock-and-bull story? If you heard a fellow in the street saying 'I am a V.C.,' you wouldn't believe him. Of course there's the riband, but it was the Cross I wanted to wear day and night—nobody looks at an inch of riband. Don't laugh."

Matilda suddenly cleared her throat, and blew her nose, which is often the prologue to conversation. I sincerely hoped she wouldn't say "Hurrah for the V.C." just this moment, for it really seemed possible that the enraged Francis might wring her neck if she mocked at him. I hastened to talk myself, for Matilda usually waits for silence before she scatters her pearls of wisdom.

"Well, apply for another one," I said. "They'll surely give you another one. Or earn another one, but apply first."

"And how many years do you think I should have

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to wait for it?" he asked. "How many departments do you think I should have to visit? How many papers and affidavits do you think I should have to sign? Apply for another one, indeed, as if the V.C. was only a pound of sugar!"

"Only a pound of sugar!" I said. "Certainly, if it takes as long as it takes to get a pound of sugar——"

Matilda gave a loud shriek.

"Gott strafe the V.C.!" she screamed. "Hurrah for Germany! Gott scratch the Kaiser's head! Bow, wow, wow, wow, wow! Pussy!"

Francis stopped dead and turned his head slowly round to where Matilda was screaming like a Pythian prophetess. She whistled like the milkman, she cuckooed, she called on her Maker's name, and on Taffy's; in a couple of minutes she had said everything she had ever known, and mixed the V.C up with them all. She laughed at the V.C.; she blew her nose at him, accompanying these awful manifestations of Matilda-ism with dancing a strange Brazilian measure on her perch. Then she stopped as suddenly as if her power of speech had been blown out like a candle, and hermetically sealed her horny beak for all conversational purposes for precisely three weeks.

Francis had stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth, so that his laughter should not interrupt Matilda, and got so red in the face I was afraid he was going to have a fit. But when she definitely

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stopped, he took the handkerchief out of his mouth, and laughed till exhaustion set in.

"O Lord! I'm so glad Matilda is true!" he said. "I was half afraid you might have invented her, though I was surprised at the impeccable art of your invention."

"Why surprised?" I asked coldly.

"Oh, I don't know. The ordinary reason. But she's really more like the British public than King Tino. They get things more mixed up than anyone I ever came across. For instance, they think that they ought to be very grave and serious, because the war is very grave and serious. Why, there's Matilda-ism for you! The only possible way of meeting a grave situation is to meet it gaily, and they would learn that if they came out to the trenches. Unless you were flippant there you would expire with depression. They are beavers at work, I allow that, but when the day's work is over they ought to be compelled to amuse themselves."

"But they don't feel inclined to," said I.

"No, and I don't feel inclined to get up in the morning, but that is no justification for lying in bed. There ought to be an amusement-board, which should make raids on private houses, if they suspected that unseemly seriousness was practised there. People talk of unseemly mirth, but they don't realize that gloom, as a general rule, is much more unseemly. Besides, you don't arrive at anything like the proper output of work if it is done

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by depressed people. Also, the quality of it is different."

"Do you mean that a shell made by cheerful munition workers has a greater explosive force than when it has been made by the melancholy?" I asked.

"I daresay that is the case, and it would account for the fact that the Boches' shells haven't been nearly so devastating lately, because beyond doubt the Boches are a good deal depressed. There is a marked sluggishness stealing into their explosives. If you want to do a good day's work on Thursday, by far the best preparation you can make for it is to have a howling jolly time on Wednesday evening. Pleasure gives you energy, and pleasure is every bit as *real* as pain, and cheerfulness as depression. I know you will say that it is the fogs that make people depressed, but it is more likely, as someone suggested, that the depressed people make the fogs. If so, I don't wonder at the impenetrable state of affairs outside."

He pointed at the window, which, as far as purposes of illumination went, was about as useful as the wall. Since dawn no light had broken through that opaque cloud of brown vapour; a moonless night was not darker than this beleaguered noonday. It had penetrated into the house and veiled the corners of the room in obscurity, and filled eyes and nose with smarting ill-smelling stuff.

"Yes, decidedly it's the depressed people who make the fog," said he. "They are the same thing

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on two different planes, for they both refuse to admit the sunshine."

"But, good heavens, aren't you ever depressed?" I asked.

"Not inside. I don't count surface depression, which can be easily produced by an aching tooth, though, indeed, I haven't got much experience of that. But I am never fundamentally depressed; I never doubt that behind the clouds is the sun still shining, as that odious school-marm Longfellow tells us. Often things are immensely tiresome, but tiresome things, painful things, have no root. They don't penetrate down to the central reality. But all happiness springs from it. Even mere pleasure is as real as pain, as I said just now; but joy, happiness, is infinitely more real than either. But somehow—I don't quite understand this, though I know it's true—somehow happiness casts a shadow, like a tree growing in the sunshine. Thomas à Kempis, as usual, is quite right when he says, 'Without sorrow none liveth in love.' But that sorrow is a thing that passes; it wheels with the sun; it is not steadfast; it is not everlasting. But it's the devil to try to describe that which from it's very nature is indescribable. Only there are so many excellent folk who think that the shadow is more real than the object which causes it."

He came and sat on the hearth-rug, where presently he stretched himself at length.

"And yet some of the best people who have ever lived," he said, "have experienced what they call

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the darkness of the soul. The whole of their belief in God and in love, all that has made them far the happiest creatures on the earth, suddenly leaves them. Their naked souls are left in outer darkness; they are convinced in their own minds—minds, I say—that there is nothing in the world except darkness. And their souls must remain perfectly steadfast, clinging in this freezing blindness to the conviction that it can't be so, that all their senses and their reasoning powers are wrong. Nothing can help them except their own unaided faith, from which all support seems withdrawn. Job had it pretty badly. It must be beastly, for you can't guess at the time what is the matter with you. Your mind simply tells you that it has become a reasoned and convinced atheist. It's a sort of possession; the devil, for some inscrutable reason, is allowed to enter into you, and he's an awful sort of tenant. He's so plausible too, so convincing. He gets hold of your mind and says, 'Just chuck overboard all that you once blindly believed, and now clear-sightedly know to be false. You needn't bother yourself to curse God and die, because there isn't such a thing as God. And instead of dying live and thoroughly enjoy yourself.' That sounds ridiculous to you and me, whose minds the devil doesn't entirely possess, but imagine what it would be if your mind had his spell cast on it, if all you had ever believed drifted away from you, and left you in the outer darkness. It would sound excellent advice then. Your mind would tell you that there was nothing beyond the

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mere material pleasures of the world. It would seem very foolish not to make the most of them, regardless of everything else, if there was nothing else."

"But all atheists are not unbridled hedonists," said I.

"More fools they. At least, from my point of view, the only possible bridle on one's carnal and material desires is the fact that one is not an atheist. What does the progress of mankind amount to considered by itself? A few scientific inventions, a little less small-pox. Is it for that that unnumbered generations have lived and suffered and enjoyed?"

"But can't atheists believe in and work for the progress of the world?" I asked.

"I know they do, but for the life of me I can't see why. I wouldn't stir a finger or make a single act of renunciation if all that inspired me was the welfare of the next generation. To me the brotherhood of man is a meaningless phrase unless it is coupled with the fatherhood of God."

"But you left Alatri, you went to fight, you won the V.C. you left in a taxi for the sake of men."

"No, for the sake of what they stood for," he said. "For the sake of that of which they are the manifestation."

He got up and looked at his watch.

"Blow it! I've got to go and see the manifestation known as the War Office," he said.

"After which?" I asked. "Will you be back for lunch?"

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"No, I don't think so. Lord, I wish I wasn't going to the War Office, specially since you have a morning off. Why shouldn't I say that I'm tired of the war—I might telephone it—or that I have become a conscientious objector, or that I've got an indisposition?"

"There's the telephone," said I.

He buckled his belt.

"Wonderful thing the telephone," he said. "And what if it's true that there's another telephone possible: I mean the telephone between the people whom we think of as living, and the people whom we don't really think of as dead? I'm going to lunch with an Aunt, by the way, who is steeped in spiritual things; so much so, indeed, that she forgets that the chief spiritual duties, as far as we know them for certain, are to be truthful and cheerful, and all those dull affairs which liars and pessimists say that anybody can do. Aunt Aggie doesn't do any of them; she's an awful liar and a hopeless pessimist, and her temper—well! But as I said, or didn't I say it—I'm going to lunch with her and go to a *séance* afterwards. She's going to inquire after Uncle Willy, who was no comfort to her in this life; but perhaps he'll make up for that now. Really London is getting rather cracked, which is the most sensible thing it ever did. I think it's the cold stodgy granite of the English temperament which I dislike so. But really it's getting chipped, it's getting cracked. Aunt Aggie bows to the new moon just like a proper Italian, and wouldn't sit down

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thirteen to dinner however hungry she was. Oh, there are flaws in Aunt Aggie's granite, and she does have such horrible food! Good-bye."

I settled down with a book, and an electric light at my elbow, and a large fire at my feet, to the entrancing occupation of not doing anything at all. The blessed sixth morning of the week had arrived, when I was not obliged to go out to a large chilly office after breakfast, and I mentally contrasted the nuisance of having to go out into a beastly morning with the bliss of not having to go out, and found the latter was far bigger with blessing than the former with beastliness. I needn't read my book. I needn't do anything that I did not want to do, but very soon the book, that I had really taken up for fear of being surprised by a servant doing nothing at all, began to engross me. It was concerned with the inexplicable telephone to which Francis had alluded, and contained an account of the communications which had been made by a young soldier killed in France with his relatives. As Francis had said, London had got cracked on the subject. . . .

After all, what wonder? Were there the slightest chance of establishing communication between the living and the dead, what subject (even the war) would be worthier of the profoundest study and experiment? Nothing more interesting, nothing more vitally important, could engross us, for which of the affairs in this world could be so important as the establishment, scientifically and firmly, of any facts that concern the next world? For there is

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one experience, namely, death, that is of absolutely universal interest. Everything else, from my little finger to Shakespeare's brain, only concerns a certain number of people; whereas death concerns the remotest Patagonian. However strongly and sincerely we may happen to believe that death is not an extinguishing of the essential self, with what intense interest we must all grab at anything which can throw light on the smallest, most insignificant detail of the life that is hereafter lived? Or, if your mind is so constructed that you do not believe in the survival of personality, how infinitely more keenly you would clutch at the remotest evidence (so long as it *is* evidence) that there is something to follow after the earth has been filled in above the body, from which, we are all agreed, *something* has departed. Without prejudice, without bias either of child-like faith or convinced scepticism, and preserving only an open mind, willing to be convinced by reasonable phenomena, there is nothing sublunar or superlunar that so vitally concerns us. You may not care about the treatment of leprosy, presumably in the belief that you will not have leprosy; you may not care about Danish politics in the belief that you will never be M.P. (if there is such a thing) for Copenhagen. But what cannot fail to interest you is the slightest evidence of what may occur to you when you pass the inevitable gates.

There are only two things that can possibly happen: the one is complete extinction (in which case I allow that the subject is closed, since if you are

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extinguished it is idle to inquire what occurs next, since nothing can occur); the other is the survival, in some form, of life, of yourself. This falls into three heads:

(*i*) Reincarnation, as an earwig, or a Hottentot, or an emperor.
(*ii*) Mere absorption into the central furnace of life.
(*iii*) Survival of personality.

And here the personal equation comes in. I cannot really believe I am going to be an earwig or an emperor. To my mind that sounds so unlikely that I cannot fix serious thought upon it. What shall I, this Me, do when I am an earwig or an emperor? How shall I feel? The mind slips from the thought, as you slip on ice, and falls down. Nor can I conceive being absorbed into the central furnace, because that, as far as personality goes, is identical with extinction. My soul will be burned in the source of life, just as my body may perhaps be burned in a crematorium, and I don't really care, in such a case, what will happen to either of them.

But my unshakeable conviction, with regard to which I long for evidence, is that I—something that I call I—will continue a perhaps less inglorious career than it has hitherto pursued. And if you assemble together a dozen healthy folk, who have got no idea of dying at present, you will find that, rooted in the consciousness of at least eleven of

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them, if they will be honest about themselves, there is this same immutable conviction that They Themselves will neither have been extinguished or reincarnated or absorbed when their bodies are put away in a furnace or a churchyard. There is the illusion or conviction of a vast majority of mankind that with the withdrawal from the body of the Something which has kept it alive, that Something does not cease to have an independent and personal existence.

Well, there has been lately an enormous increase in the number of those who seek evidence on this overwhelmingly interesting subject. The book which I have been reading and wondering over treats of it, and Francis has gone with his Aunt Aggie to seek it. There has been, too, it is only fair to say, an enormous increase in the exasperation of the folk who, knowing nothing whatever about the subject, and scorning to make any study of what they consider such hopeless balderdash, condemn all those who have an open mind on the question as blithering idiots, hoodwinked by the trickery of so-called mediums. Out of their own inner consciousness they know that there can be no such thing as communication between the living and the dead, and there's the end of the matter. All who think there possibly may be such communication are fools, and all who profess to be able to produce evidence for it are knaves. . . . They themselves, being persons of sanity and common-sense, know that it is impossible.

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But other shining examples of sanity and common-sense would undoubtedly have affirmed thirty years ago, with the same pontifical infallibility, that such a thing as wireless telegraphy was impossible, or a hundred years ago that it was equally ridiculous to think that a sort of big tea-kettle could draw a freight of human beings along iron rails at sixty miles an hour. But wireless telegraphy and express trains *happened,* in spite of their sanity and common-sense, and it seems to me that if we deny the possibility of this communication between the living and the dead, we are acting in precisely the same manner as those same sensible people would have acted thirty and a hundred years ago.

Another favourite assertion of the sane and sensible is that if they could get evidence themselves (though they foam with rage at the very notion of attempting to do such a thing) they would believe it. That is precisely the same thing as saying you will not believe in Australia till you have been there. For the existence of Australia depends (for those who have never seen it) on the evidence of others. The evidence for the existence of Australia is overwhelming, and therefore we are right to accept it, even though we have not seen it ourselves. Kangaroos and gold, and Australian troops and postage-stamps, and the voyages of steamers, makes its existence absolutely certain; there is no doubt whatever about it. And the evidence in favour of the possibility of communication between this world and another non-material world is now in process

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of accumulation. It is being studied by people who are eminent in the scientific world, and it seems that there are fragments, scraps of evidence, which must be treated with the respect of an open mind by all who have not the pleasant gift of the infallibility that springs from complete ignorance. It is no longer any use to quote from Mr. Sludge the Medium. . . .

There are a great many gullible people in the world and a great many fraudulent ones, and when the two get togther round a table in a darkened room, it is obvious that there is a premium on trickery. But because a certain medium is a knave and a vagabond, who ought to be put in prison, and others are such as should not be allowed to go out, except with their minds under care of a nurse, it does not follow that there are no such things as genuine manifestations. It would be as reasonable to say that because a child does his multiplication sum wrong, there is something unsound in the multiplication table. A fraudulent medium does not invalidate a possible genuineness in those who are not cheats; a quack or a million quacks do not cast a slur on the science of medicine. In questions of spiritualism there is no denying that the number of quacks exposed and unexposed is regrettably large, and, without doubt, all spiritualistic phenomena should be ruthlessly and pitilessly scrutinized. But when this is done, it is only a hide-bound stupidity that refuses to treat the results with respect.

Other reservations must be made. All results

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that can conceivably be accounted for by such well-established phenomena as telepathy or thought-reading must be unhesitatingly ruled out. They are deeply interesting in themselves, they are like the traces of other metals discovered in exploring a gold-reef, but they are not the gold, and have no more to do with the thing inquirers are in quest of than have acid-drops or penny buns. Many mediums (so-called) are not mediums at all, but have that strange and marvellous gift of being able to explore the minds of others. . . .

What is the working and mechanism of that group of phenomena, among which we may class hypnotism, thought-reading, telepathy, and so forth, we do not rightly know. But inside the conscious self of every human being there lurks the sub-conscious or subliminal self, which has something to do with all these things. Every event that happens to a man, every thought that passes through his mind, every impression that his brain receives makes a mark on it, similar, perhaps, to the minute dots on phonograph records. That phonograph record (probably) is in the keeping of the sub-conscious mind, and though the conscious mind may have forgotten the fact, and the circumstances in the making of any of these marks, the sub-conscious mind has it recorded, and, under certain conditions, can produce it again. And it is the sub-conscious mind which without doubt exercises those thought-reading and telepathic functions. In most people it lies practically inaccessible; others, numerically few, ap-

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pear, in trance or even without the suspension of the conscious mind, to be able to exercise its powers, and—leaving out the mere conjuring tricks of fraudulent persons—it is they who pass for mediums.

What happens? This: A bereaved mother or a bereaved wife sits with one of those mediums. The medium goes into a genuine trance, and probing the mind of the eager expectant sitter, can tell her all sorts of intimate details about the husband or son who has been killed which are already known to her. The medium can produce his name, his appearance; can recount events and happenings of his childhood; can even say things which the mother has forgotten, but which prove to be true. Is it any wonder that the sitter is immensely impressed? She is more than impressed, she is consoled and comforted when the medium proceeds to add (still not quite fraudulently) messages of love and assurance of well-being. It is not quite conscious fraud; it is perhaps a fraud of the sub-conscious mind.

Now all this, these reminiscences, these encouraging messages from the other world, have to be ruled out if we want to get at the real thing. They are phenomena vastly interesting in themselves, but they are clearly accountable for by the established theory of thought-reading. They need have nothing whatever to do with communications from discarnate spirits, for they can be accounted for by a natural law already known to us. They do not

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help in the slightest degree to establish the new knowledge for which so many are searching. . . .

Francis had come back from his lunch and his *séance* with Aunt Aggie, and a considerable part of these reflections are really a *précis* of our discussion. It had been quite a good thought-reading *séance:* Uncle Willy, through the mouth of the medium in trance, had affirmed his dislike of parsnips and mushrooms, had mentioned his name, and nickname, Puffin, by which Aunt Aggie had known him, and had described with extraordinary precision the room where he used to sit.

"I was rather impressed," said Francis. "It really was queer, for silly though Aunt Aggie is, I don't think she had previously gone to Amber—yes, the medium was Amber, just Amber—and primed her with regard to this information. Amber read it all right out of Aunt Aggie's mind. But then Uncle Willy became so extremely unlike himself that I couldn't possibly believe it was Uncle Willy; it must have been a sort of reflection of what Aunt Aggie hoped he had become. He was deeply edifying; he said he was learning to be patient; he told us that he had improved wonderfully. Poor Aunt Aggie sobbed, and I knew she loved sobbing. It made her feel good inside. All the same——" He let himself lie inertly on the sofa, in that supreme bodily laziness which, as I have said, gives his mind the greater activity.

"It was all a thought-reading *séance,*" he said, "quite good of its kind, but it had no more to do with

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the other world than Matilda. . . . But why shouldn't there be a way through between the material and the spiritual, just as there is a way for telegraphy, as you said, without wires? Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, no doubt, a so-called message from the other side is only a subtle intercommunication between minds on this side. It's so hard to guard against that. But it might be done. We might think of some piece of knowledge known only to a fellow who was dead."

Suddenly he jumped up.

"I've thought of a lovely plan," he said. "Go for a walk, if you haven't been out all day, or go and have a bath or something, and while you are gone I'll prepare a packet, and seal it up in a box. Nobody will know but me. And then when the next bit of shrapnel comes along and hits me instead of the potted-meat tin, you will pay half-a-guinea, I think it is—I know I paid for Aunt Aggie and myself—and see if a medium can tell you what is in that box. Nobody will know except me, and I shall be dead, so it really will look very much as if I had a hand in it if a medium in trance can tell you what is in it. A box can't telepathize, can it? The Roman Catholics say it's devil-work to communicate with the dead; they say all sorts of foul spirits get hold of the other end of the telephone. Isn't it lucky we aren't Roman Catholics?"

"And what about the War Office?" I said, chiefly because I didn't want either to go out or have a bath.

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"Oh, I forgot. I'm going to be sent out to the Italian front. We've got some people there, and it seems they don't know Italian very well. I don't know what I shall be quite: I think a sort of Balaam's ass that talks, a sort of mule perhaps with a mixed Italian and English parentage. Duties? Ordering dinner, I suppose."

"Lucky devil!"

"I'm not sure. I think I would sooner take my chance in the trenches. But off I go day after tomorrow. Lord, if I get a week's leave now and then, shan't I fly to Alatri! Can't you come out, too, to look after your Italian property? Fancy having a week at Alatri again! There won't be bathing, of course; but how I long to hear the swish and bang of the shutters that Pasqualino has forgotten to hitch to, in the Tramontana! And the sweeping of the wind in the stone-pine! And the glow and crackle of the wood-fire on the hearth! And the draughty rooms! And the springing up of the freezias! And Seraphina, fat Seraphina, and the smell of frying! Fancy being *heedless* again for a week! I feel sure the war has never touched the enchanted island. The world as it was! Good Lord, the world as it was!"

He had sat and then lain down on the floor.

"It's odd," he said, "that though I wouldn't change that which I am, and that which I know, for anything that went before, I long for a week, a day, an hour of the time when all the material jollinesses of the world were so magically exciting. Oh, the

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pleasant evenings when one didn't think, but just enjoyed what was there! There's a great lump of Boy still in me, which I don't get rid of. The cache: think of the cache we were going to revisit in September, 1914! After all, It, the mystical thing that matters, was there all the time, though one didn't really know it. . . . But I should love to get the world as it was again. I don't want it for long, I think, but just for a little while. Rest, you know, child's play, nonsense, Italy. I would buckle to again afterwards, but it would be nice to be an animal again. I want not to think about anything that matters, God, and my soul, and right and wrong. . . .

"I want to rebel. Just for a minute. I daresay it's the devil who makes me want. It's a way he has. 'Be an innocent child,' says he, 'and don't think. Just look at the jolly things, and the beautiful things, and take your choice!' I don't want to be beastly, but I do want to get out of the collar of the only life which I believe to be real. I want to eat and drink and sit in the sun, and hear the shutters bang, and read a witty wicked book, and see a friend—you, in fact—and do again what we did; I want to quench the light invisible, and make it invisible, really invisible, for a minute or two. I suppose that's blasphemy all right."

He lay silent a moment, and then got up.

"Oh, do go for a walk," he said, "while I prepare my posthumous packet. Or prepare a posthumous packet for me. You may die first, you see; it's

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easily possible that you may die first now that they're not sending me to the trenches again, and it would be so interesting after your lamentable decease to be told by a medium what you had put in the packet. Let's do that. Let each of us prepare a posthumous packet, and seal it up, and on yours you must put directions that it is to be delivered to me unopened. I needn't put anything on mine; you can keep them both in a cupboard till one of us dies. And the survivor will consult a medium as to what is in the late lamented's packet. Only the late lamented will know. Really, it will be a great test. Come on. It will be like playing caches again. Mind you put something ridiculous in yours."

I procured two cardboard boxes, of which we each took one, and went to my bedroom to select unlikely objects. Eventually I decided on a "J" nib, a five-franc piece and a small quantity of carbolic tooth-powder. These I put in my box, put directions on the top that it was to be given on my death to Francis, and went downstairs again, where I found him sealing his up. I put them both in a drawer of a table and locked it.

"Lord, how I long to tell you what I've put in mine!" said Francis.

More than half the month has passed (I am writing, as a matter of evidential data, on the 17th of January), and I desire to record with the utmost accuracy gleanable in such affairs, the general feeling of the inhabitants of London with regard to the

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war. Briefly, then, a huge wave of optimism—for which God be thanked—has roared over the town. Peace Notes, and the replies to them, and the replies to those replies have been probably the wind that raised that wave, or, in other words, the super-coxcomb who rules the German Empire has expressed his "holy wrath" at the reply of our Allied nations to his gracious granting of peace on his own terms. But England and France and Russia and Italy have unanimously wondered when, in the history of the world, a nation that proclaimed itself victor has offered peace to the adversary it proclaimed it has conquered. Germany, not only belligerent, but also apparently umpire, has announced that she has won the war, and therefore offers peace to her victims. That was a most astounding piece of news, and it surprised us all very much. But what must have surprised Germany more was the supposedly-expiring squeal of her victims which intimated that they were not conquered. Hence the "holy wrath" of the World-War-Lord, who had intimated, as out of Sinai, that they were conquered. They don't think so—they may be wrong, but they just don't think so. Instead they are delighted with his victorious proclamation, and take the proclamation as evidence that he is not victorious. German newspapers have been, if possible, more childishly profane than he, and tell us they are ready to grasp the hand of God Almighty, who is giving such success to their submarine warfare. They said just that; it was their duty to shake hands with God

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Almighty, because with His aid they had sunk so many defenceless merchant ships. Perhaps that "goes down" in Germany, for it appears that they are short of food, and would gladly swallow anything.

But here we are, the conquered beleaguered nation—and by a tiresome perversity we delight in the savage glee of our conquerors, for we happen to believe that it expresses, not glee of the conqueror, but the savage snarl of a fighting beast at bay. Rightly or wrongly, we think just that, and the louder the pæans from Germany, the brighter are the eyes here. Though still the bitterness of this winter of war binds us with stricture of frost, a belief in the approaching advent of spring, now in mid-January, possesses everybody. Reports, the authenticity of which it is no longer possible to doubt, are rife concerning the internal conditions of Germany and Austria, which is beginning to be intolerable. There is not starvation, nor anything like starvation, but the stress of real want grows daily, and we all believe that from one cause or other, from this, or from the great offensive on the Western front, the preparations for which, none doubts, are swiftly and steadily maturing, the breaking of winter is in sight. Perhaps all we optimists, as has happened before, will again prove to be wrong, and some great crumbling or collapse may be threatening one of the Allies. But to-day the quality of optimism is somehow different from what it has been before. Also, the black background of

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war (not yet lifted), in front of which for the last two years and a half our lives have enacted themselves, has become infinitely and intensely more engrossing. But here in England and France and Italy and Russia, it is pierced with sudden gleams of sunshine; there are rifts in it through which for a moment or two shines the light of the peace that is coming. Only over Germany it hangs black and unbroken.

A king gave a feast to his lords and by his command there were brought in the spoils and the vessels which he had taken from the house of God which he had sacked and destroyed. In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote on the wall of the king's palace. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another. For he had lifted himself up against the Lord of Heaven, and he knew that his doom was written. There was no need to call in the astrologers and soothsayers, or to search for a Daniel who should be able to interpret the writing, or to promise to him who should read the writing and show the interpretation thereof a clothing of scarlet, a chain of gold, and that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom, for the king's captains and his lords, and the king himself, knew what the meaning and the interpretation of the writing was. In silence they sat as they read it, and they sat in silence looking in each other's eyes which were bright with terror, and on each

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other's faces which were blanched with dread. But most of all they looked at the king himself, still clad in his shining armour, and the cold foam of his doom was white on the lips that profaned the name of the Most Highest, and the hand that still grasped the hilt of the sword which to his eternal infamy he had unscabbarded and to his everlasting dishonour had soaked in innocent blood, was shaken with an ague of mortal fear. And this is the writing that was written: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN,* for God had numbered his kingdom and finished it; he was weighed in the balance and found wanting; his kingdom was divided.

Even so, as in the days of King Belshazzar, is the doom written of him who, above all others, is responsible for the blood that has been outpoured on the battle-field of Europe, for the shattered limbs, the blinded eyes, for the murder of women and children from below on the high seas, and from above in their undefended homes. God set him on the throne of his fathers, and out of his monstrous vanity, his colossal and inhuman ambitions, he has given over the harvest fields of the East to the reaper Death, and has caused blood to flow from the wine presses of the West. East and West he has blared out his infamous decree that evil is good, might is right, that murder and rape and the unspeakable tales of Teutonic atrocities are deeds well pleasing in the sight of God. And even as in the days when, with his fool's-cap stuck on top of his Imperial diadem, and the jester's bells a-tinkle

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against his shining armour, he paraded through the courts of Europe and the castles of his dupes, as Supreme Artist, Supreme Musician, Supreme Preacher, as well as Supreme War Lord, and fancied himself set so high above the common race of man that no human standard could measure him; so now his infamy has sunk him so low beneath the zones of human sympathy that not till we can feel pity for him who first left the love-supper of His Lord and hanged himself, we shall commiserate the doom that thickens round the head of the Judas who has betrayed his country and his God in hope to gratify his insensate dream of world-wide domination.

There still he sits at the feast with his lords and captains, but the wine is spilt from his cup, and his thoughts are troubled and voices of despair whisper to him out of the invading night. Low already burn the lights in the banqueting-hall that was once so nobly ablaze with the glory of those who in the sciences and the arts and in learning and high philosophy made Germany a prince among nations. He and his dupes and his flatterers have made a brigand and a pirate of her, have well and truly earned for her the scorn and the detestation of all civilized minds and lovers of high endeavour, and in the *Dämmerung* that gathers ever thicker round them the fingers of a man's hand trace on the wall the letters of pale flame that need no Daniel to interpret. The painted timbers of the roof are cracking, the tapestries are rent, the spilt wine

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congeals in pools of blood, and the legend of the decree of God blazes complete in the ruin of the shambles where they sit.

It is then this belief that ruin is moving swiftly and steadily up over the Central Empires that causes the war once more, as in its earlier days, to engross the whole of our thoughts. It is coming, as it were, in the traditional manner of a thunderstorm against the wind, for there is no use in pretending that, as far as military and naval operations go, the wind is not at the moment being favourable to our enemies. By sea the submarine menace is more serious than it has been since the war begun; there is still no advance on the West front, while on the East the complete over-running of Roumania cannot be called a success from our point of view. But in spite of this, there is the rooted belief that the collapse which we have so long waited for is getting measureably nearer. None knows, and few are rash enough to assert when it will come, or what month, near or distant, will see it, and in the meantime the broom of the new Government, to judge by the dust it raises, may be thought to be sweeping clean, and the appalling bequests of our late rulers, the accumulated remains of sloppy Cabinet puddings, are being vigorously relegated to the dustbins. With the ineradicable boyishness of the nation (which really has a good deal to be said for it), we still tend to make a game out of serious necessities, and are having great

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sport over the question of food. For a few weeks we amused ourselves over one of the most characteristic inventions of the last Government, and tried to see how much we could eat without indulging in more than three courses for dinner or two for lunch, which was what the late Food Controller allowed us. This was an amusing game, but as a policy it had insuperable defects, as, for instance, when we consider that the bulk of the working population takes its solid meal in the middle of the day, and would no more think of eating three courses in the evening than of eating four in the morning. There was a regular tariff: meat counted as one course, pudding another, toasted cheese another, but you were allowed any quantity of cold cheese, bread and butter (those articles in which national economy was really important) without counting anything at all. In the same way you could have as many slices of beef as you wished (as the Government wanted to effect a saving in the consumption of meat), but to touch an apple or a pear, about which there was no desire to save, cost you a course. Altogether it was one of the least helpful, but most comic schemes that could well be devised. Matilda, I fancy, thought it out and communicated it to Mr. Runciman by the telepathy that exists between bird-like brains. It is in flat and flagrant violation of human psychology, for you have only to tell the perverse race of mankind that they may only eat two dishes, to ensure that they will eat much more of those two dishes than was comprised in the whole

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of their unrestricted meals, while to allow them to eat as much cheese as they wish is simply to make cheese-eaters out of those who never dreamed of touching it before. But there is a rumour now that we are to go back to our ordinary diet again, which I take to be true, for when this morning I gave Matilda a list of the regulations to show her how it looked in print, she uttered a piercing yell and tore the card into a million fragments.

But with the new broom has come a powerful deal of cleaning up: there is a new Food Board, and a Man Power Board, and a fifty per cent. increase in railway fares (which will be nice for the dividends of railway companies), and hints of meatless days and sugar tickets, and there are ideas of ploughing up the parks and planting wheat there (which will be nice for the wood-pigeons). Indeed, as Francis said, we are perhaps beginning to take the war seriously, though, on the other hand, since he left the prevalent optimism has largely remedied the absence of the gaiety which he so much deplored.

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FEBRUARY, 1917.

GERMANY has proposed a toast. She drinks (*Hoch!*) to the freedom of the seas. And she couples with it the freedom (of herself) to torpedo from her submarines any vessel, neutral or belligerent, at sight, and without warning.

So now at last we know what the freedom of the seas means. The seas are to be free in precisely the sense that Belgium is free, and Germany is free to commit murder on them.

This declaration on the part of Germany was followed three days later by a declaration on the part of the United States. Diplomatic relations have been instantly severed, and President Wilson only waits for a "clear overt act" of hostility on the part of Germany to declare war.

America has declared her mind with regard to the freedom of the seas, and that abominable toast has led to the severance of diplomatic relations between her and Germany. Count Bernstorff has been dismissed, and in Berlin Mr. Gerard has asked for his passports. There is no possible shadow of doubt what that means, for we all remember August 4th, 1914, when we refused to discuss the overrunning of Belgium by Germany. War followed instantly and automatically. "You shan't do that,"

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was the equivalent of "If you do, we fight." It is precisely the same position between America and Germany now. Germany *will* torpedo neutrals at sight, just as Germany would overrun Belgium. The rest follows. Q.E.D.

But it is impossible to overstate the relief with which England has hailed this unmistakable word on the part of the United States. Many people have said: "What can America do if she does come in?" But that was not really the point. Of course she will do, as a matter of fact, a tremendous lot. She will finance our Allies; she is rich, beyond all dreams of financiers, with the profits she has reaped from the war, and the loans she will float will eclipse into shadow all that England has already done in that regard. "But what else?" ask the sceptics. "What of her army? She has no army." Nor for that matter had England when the war began. But even the sceptics cannot deny the immense value of her fleet. In the matter of torpedo-boats and of light craft generally, which we so sorely need for the hunting down of those great-hearted champions of the freedom of the seas, the German submarines, she can double our weapons, or, as the more enthusiastic say, she can more than double them. All the Government munition factories will be working like ours, day and night; she may even bring in conscription; she will devote to the cause of her Allies the million inventive brains with which she teems. This is just a little part of what America could have done, when first the Belgian Treaty was

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torn over, and it is just a little part of what America will do now.

But all that she can do, as I said, is beside the point. The point is, not what America can do, but what America *is*. Now she has shown what she is a nation which will not suffer wrong and robbery and piracy. The disappointments of the past, with regard to her, are wiped off. She was remote from Europe, and remote from her was the wrong done to Belgium. . . . There is no need now to recount the tale of outrages that did not exhaust her patience. She waited—wisely, we are willing to believe—until she was ready, until the President knew that he had the country behind him, and until some outrage of the laws of man and of God became intolerable. It has now become intolerable to her and if she is willing to clasp the hands of those who once doubted her, and now see how wrong it was to doubt, a myriad of hands are here held out for her grasping.

The splendour of this, its late winter sunrise, has rendered quite colourless things that in time of peace would have filled the columns of every newspaper, and engrossed every thought of its readers. A plot, unequalled since the days of the Borgias, has come to light, the object of which was to kill the Prime Minister by means of poisoned arrows, or of poisoned thorns in the inside of the sole of his boot. Never was there so picturesque an abomination. The poison employed was to be that Indian secretion of deadly herbs called *curare*, a prick of

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which produces a fatal result. A party of desperate women, opposed to conscription, invoked the aid of a conscripted chemist, and Borgianism, full-fledged, flared to life again in the twentieth century, with a setting of Downing Street and the golf-links at Walton Heath. To the student of criminology the Crippen affair should have faded like the breath on a frosty morning, compared with the scheme of this staggering plot. But with this Western sunrise over America to occupy our public minds, no one (except, I suppose, the counsel in the case and the prisoners) gave two thoughts to this anachronistic episode. And there was the Victory War Loan and National Service as well.

But though the public mind of any individual can be satiated with sensation, my experience is that the private mind "carries on" much the same as usual. If the trump of the Last Judgment was to sound to-morrow morning, tearing us from our sleep, and summoning us out to Hyde Park or some other open space, I verily believe that we should all look up at the sky that was vanishing like a burning scroll, and consider the advisability of taking an umbrella, or of putting on a coat. Little things do not, in times of the greatest excitement, at all cease to concern us; the big thing absorbs a certain part of our faculties, and when it has annexed these, it cannot claim the dominion of little things as well. And for this reason, I suppose, I do not much attend to the Borgia plot, since my public sympathies are so inflamed with America;

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but when work is done (or shuffled somehow away, to be attended to to-morrow) I fly on the wings of the Tube to Regent's Park, and, once again, ridiculously concern myself with the marks that it is possible to make on ice with a pair of skates, used one at a time (unless you are so debased as to study grape-vines). There is a club which has its quarters in that park, which in summer is called the Toxophilite, and in winter "The Skating Club" ("The" as opposed to all other skating clubs), and to the ice provided there on the ground where in summer enthusiastic archers fit their winged arrows to yew-wood bows, we recapture the legitimate joys of winter. Admirals and Generals, individuals of private and public importance, all skulk up there with discreet black bags, which look as if they might hold dispatches, but really hold skates, and cast off Black Care, and cast themselves onto the ice. An unprecedented Three Weeks (quite as unprecedented as those of that amorous volume) have been vouchsafed us, and day after day, mindful of the fickleness of frost in our sub-tropical climate, we have compounded with our consciences, when they reminded us that it was time to go back to work, on the plea that skating was so scarce, and that in all probability the frost would be gone to-morrow. To snatch a pleasure that seldom comes within reach always gives a zest to the enjoyment of it, and we have snatched three weeks of this, under the perpetual stimulus of imagining that each day would be the last. Indeed, it has been a return

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to the Glacial Age, when we must suppose there was skating all the year round. Probably that was why there were no wars, as far as we can ascertain, in that pacific epoch of history. Everyone was so intent on skating and avoiding collisions with the mammoths (who must rather have spoiled the ice) that he couldn't find enough superfluous energy to quarrel with his fellows. You have to lash yourself up, and be lashed up in order to quarrel, and you are too busy for that when there is skating. . . . Was it to the Glacial Age that the hymn referred, which to my childish ears ran like this:

> That war shall be no more;
> And lusto, pression, crime
> Shall flee thy face before.

I never knew, nor cared to inquire, what "lusto" was, nor what "Thy face before" could mean. For faces usually were before, not behind.

While we have been enjoying these unusual rigours, Francis, "somewhere in Italy," at a place, as far as I can gather, which not so long ago used to be "somewhere in Austria," has not been enjoying the return of the Glacial Age at all. He has written, indeed, in a strain most unusual with him and as unlike as possible to his normal radiance of content. "On the calmer sort of day," he says, "the wind blows a hurricane, and on others two hurricanes. I can hear the wind whistling through my bones, whistling through them as it whistles through telegraph wires, and the cold eats them away, as when the frost gets into potatoes. Also, the work

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is duller than anything I have yet come across in this world, and I am doing nothing that the man in a gold-lace cap who stands about in the hall of an hotel and expects to be tipped because of his great glory, could not do quite as well as I. Besides, he would do it with much greater urbanity than I can scrape together, for it is hard to be urbane when you have an almost perpetual stomach-ache of the red-hot poker order. But in ten days now I go down to Rome, where I shall be for some weeks, and I shall sit in front of a fire or in the sun, if there is such a thing as the sun left in this ill-ordered universe, and see a doctor. I dislike the thought of that, because it always seems to me rather disgraceful to be ill. One wasn't intended to be ill. . . . But I daresay the doctor will tell me that I'm not, and it will be quite worth while hearing that. Anyhow, I shall hope to get across to the beloved island for a few days, before I return to this tooth-chattering table-land. This is too grousy and grumbly a letter to send off just as it is. Anyhow, I will keep it till to-morrow to see if I can't find anything more cheerful to tell you."

But there was nothing added, and I must simply wait for further news from him. It is impossible not to feel rather anxious, for the whole tenor of his letter, from which this is but an extract, is strangely unlike the Francis who extracted gaiety out of Gallipoli. There is, however, this to be said, that he has practically never known pain, in his

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serene imperturable health, which, though I am not a Christian Scientist, I believe is largely due to the joyful serenity of his spiritual health, and that probably pain is far more intolerable to him than it would be to most people who have the ordinary mortal's share of that uncomfortable visitor. But a "red-hot poker" pain perpetually there does not sound a reassuring account, and I confess that I wait for his next letter with anxiety.

The ruthless submarine campaign has begun, and there is no use in blinking the fact that at present it constitutes a serious menace. Owing to the criminal folly of the late Government, their obstinate refusal to take any steps whatever with regard to the future, their happy-go-lucky and imperfect provision just for the needs of the day, without any foresight as to what the future enterprise of the enemy might contrive, we are, as usual, attempting to counter a blow after it has been struck. Pessimism and optimism succeed each other in alternate waves, and at one time we remind ourselves that there is not more than six weeks' supply of food in the country, and at another compare the infinitesimally small proportion of the tonnage that is sunk per week with that which arrives safely at its destination. Wild rumours fly about (all based on the best authority) concerning the number of submarines which are hunting the seas, only to be met by others, equally well attested, which tell us how many of those will hunt the seas no more. There

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appear to be rows and rows of them in Portsmouth Harbour; they line the quays. And instantly you are told that at the present rate of sinking going on among our merchant navy, we shall arrive at the very last grain of corn about the middle of May. For myself, I choose to believe all the optimistic reports, and turn a deaf ear, like the adder, to anything that rings with a sinister sound. Whatever be the truth of all these contradictory and reliable facts, it is quite outside my power to help or hinder, beyond making sure that my household does not exceed the weekly allowance of bread and meat that the Food Controller tells me is sufficient. If we are all going to starve by the middle of May, well, there it is! Starvation, I fancy, is an uncomfortable sort of death, and I would much sooner not suffer it, but it is quite outside my power to avert it. Frankly, also, I do not believe it in the smallest degree. Pessimistic acquaintances prove down to the hilt that it will be so, and not knowing anything about the subject, I am absolutely unable to find the slightest flaw in their depressing conclusions. They seem to me based on sound premises, which are quite unshakeable, and to be logically arrived at. But if you ask whether I believe in the inevitable fate that is going to overtake us, why, I do not. It simply doesn't seem in the least likely.

In addition to this development of enemy submarine warfare (for our discomfort), there have been developments on the Western front (we hope

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for theirs). The English lines have pushed forward on both sides of the Ancre, to find that the Germans, anticipating the great spring offensive, which appears to be one of the few certain things in the unconjecturable unfolding of the war, have given ground without fighting. In consequence there has ensued a pause while our lines of communication have been brought up to the new front across the devastated and tortured terrain which for so many months has been torn up by the hail of exploding shells. And for that, as for everything else that happens, we find authoritative and contradictory reasons. Some say that the Germans could not hold it, and take this advance to be the first step in the great push which is to break and shatter them; others with long faces and longer tongues explain that this strategic retreat has checkmated our plans for the great push. But be this as it may (I verily believe that I am the only person in London who has not been taken into the confidence of our Army Council), all are agreed that the bell has sounded for the final round of the fight, except a few prudent folk who bid us prepare at once for the spring campaign of 1918 (though we are all going to be starved in 1917).

The frost came to an end, and a thaw more bitter and more congealing to the blood and the vital forces set in with cold and dispiriting airs from the South-East. For a week we paid in mud and darkness and fog for the days of exhilarating weather,

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and I suppose the Toxophilites took possession of the skating rink again. And then came one of those miracle days, that occasionally occur in February or March, a moulted feather from the breast of the bird of spring, circling high in the air before, with descending rustle of downward wings, it settled on the earth. . . .

I had gone down into the country for a couple of nights, arriving at the house where I was to stay at the close of one of those chilly dim-lit February days, after a traverse of miry roads between sodden hedgerows off which the wind blew the drops of condensed mists that gathered there, and it seemed doubtful whether the moisture would not be turned to icicles before morning. I had a streaming cold, and it seemed quite in accordance with the existing "scheme of things entire" that the motor (open of course) should break down on the steep ascent, and demand half an hour's tinkering before it would move again. Eventually I arrived, only to find that my hostess had gone to bed that afternoon with influenza, having telegraphed too late to stop me, and that the two other guests were not coming till next day.

Now I am no foe, on principle, to a solitary evening. There is a great deal to be said for dining quite alone, with a book propped up against the candlestick, a rapid repast, some small necessary task (or more book) to while away an hour or two in a useful or pleasant manner, and the sense of virtue which accompanies an early retirement to bed.

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But all this has to be anticipated, if not arranged, and I found a very different programme. I dined in a stately manner, and dish after dish (anyone who dines alone never wants more than two things to eat) was presented to my notice. At the conclusion of this repast, which would have been quite delicious had there only been somebody to enjoy it with me, or even if all sense of taste had not been utterly obliterated by catarrh, I was conducted to the most palatial room that I know in any English house, and shut in with the evening paper, a roaring fire, half a dozen of the finest Reynolds and Romneys in the world sailing about and smiling on the walls, and the news that my hostess was far from well, but hoped I had everything I wanted. As a matter of fact I had nothing I wanted, because I wanted somebody to talk to, though I had the most sumptuous *milieu* of things that I didn't want. Reynolds and Romney and a grand piano and an array of books and a box of cigars were of no earthly use to me just then, because I wanted to be with something alive, and no achievement in mere material could take the place of a living thing. I would humbly have asked the footman who brought me my coffee-cup, or the butler who so generously filled it for me to stop and talk, or play cards, or do anything they enjoyed doing, if I had thought that there was the smallest chance of their consenting. But I saw from their set formal faces that they would only have thought me mad, and I supposed that the reputation for sanity should not be

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thrown away unless there was something to be gained from the hazard. And where was the use of going to bed at half-past nine?

The most hopeful object in the room was the fire, for it had some semblance of real life about it. True, it was only a make-believe: that roaring energy was really no more than a destructive process. But it glowed and coruscated; the light of its consuming logs leaped on the walls in jovial defiance of this sombre and solitary evening, it blazed forth a challenge against the depressing elements of wet and cold. It was elemental itself, and though it was destructive, it was yet the source of all life as well as its end. It warmed and comforted; to sit near its genial warmth was a make-believe of basking in the sun to those who had groped through an endless autumn and winter of dark days. The sunshine that had made the trees put forth the branches that were now burning on the hearth was stored in them, and was being released again in warmth and flame. It was but bottled sunshine, so to speak, but there was evidence in it that there once had been sunshine, and that encouraged the hope that one day there would be sunshine again.

Quite suddenly I became aware that some huge subtle change had taken place. It was not that my dinner and the fire had warmed and comforted me, but it came from outside. Something was happening there, though it never occurred to me to guess what it was. But I pushed back my chair from the

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imitation of summer that sparkled on the hearth, drew back the curtain from the window that opened on to the terrace, and stepped out. And then I knew what it was, for spring had come.

The rain had ceased, the clouds that had blanketed the sky two hours before had been pushed and packed away into a low bank in the West, and a crescent moon was swung high in the mid-heaven. And whether it was that by miraculous dispensation my cold, which for days had inhibited the powers of sense and taste, stood away from me for a moment, or whether certain smells are perceived, not by the clumsy superficial apparatus of material sense, but by some inward recognition, I drank in that odour which is among the most significant things that can be conveyed to the mortal sense, the smell of the damp fruitful earth touched once again with the eternal spell of life. You can often smell damp earth on summer mornings or after summer rain, when it is coupled with the odour of green leaves or flowers, or on an autumn morning, when there is infused into it the stale sharp scent of decaying foliage, but only once or twice in the year, and that when the first feather from the breast of spring falls to the ground, can you experience that thrill of promise that speaks not of what is, but of what is coming. It is just damp earth, but earth which holds in suspense that which makes the sap stream out to the uttermost finger-tips of the trees, and burst in squibs of green. Not growth itself, but the potentiality of growth is there. The earth says,

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"Behold, I make all things new!" and the germs of life, the seeds and the bulbs, and all that is waiting for spring, strain upwards and put forth the green spears that pierce the soil. But earth, young everlasting Mother Earth, must first issue her invitation; says she, "I am ready," and lies open to the renewal of life. . . .

I hope that however long I happen to inhabit this delightful planet, I shall never outlive that secret call of spring. When you are young it calls to you more physically, and you go out into the moonlit night, or out into the dark, while the rain drips on you, and somehow you make yourself one with it, digging with your fingers into the earth, or clinging to a wet tree-bough in some blind yearning for communion with the life that tingles through the world. But when you are older, you do not, I hope, become in the least wiser, if by wisdom is implied the loss of that exquisite knowledge of the call of spring. You have learned that: it is yours, it has grown into your bones, and it is impossible to experience as new what you already possess. You act the play no longer; it is for you to sit and watch it, and the test of your freedom from fatigued senility, your certificate to that effect, will lie in the fact that you will observe with no less rapture than you once enjoyed. You stand a little apart, you must watch it now, not take active part in it. But you will have learned the lesson of spring and the lesson of life very badly if you turn your back on it. For the moment you turn your back on it,

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or yawn in your stall when that entrancing drama of unconscious youth is played in front of you, whether the actors are the moon and the dripping shrubs and the smell of damp earth, or a boy and a girl making love in a flowery lane or in a back-yard, you declare yourself old. If the upspringing of life, the tremulous time, evokes no thrill in you, the best place (and probably the most comfortable) for you is the grave. On the other side of the grave there may be a faint possibility of your becoming young again (which, after all, is the only thing it is worth while being), but on this side of the grave you don't seem able to manage it. God forbid that on this side of the grave you should become a grizzly kitten, and continue dancing about and playing with the blind-cord long after you ought to have learned better, but playing with the blind-cord is one of the least important methods of manifesting youth. . . .

I was recalled from the terrace by decorous clinkings within, and went indoors to find the butler depositing a further tray of syphons and spirits on the table, and wishing to know at what time I wished to be called. On which, taking this as a hint that before I was called, I certainly had to go to bed (else how could I be called?), I went upstairs, and letting the night of spring pour into my room, put off into clear shallow tides of sleep, grounding sometimes, and once more being conscious of the night wind stirring about my room, and sliding off again into calm and sunlit waters. Often sleep and

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consciousness were mixed up together; I was aware of the window curtains swaying in the draught while I lay in a back-water of calm, and then simultaneously, so it seemed, it was not this mature and middle-aged I who lay there, but myself twenty-five years ago, eager and expectant and flushed with the authentic call of spring. By some dim dream-like double-consciousness I could observe the young man who lay in my place; I knew how the young fool felt, and envied him a little, and then utterly ceased to envy him, just because *I had been that,* and had sucked the honey out of what he felt, and had digested it and made it mine. It was part of me: where was the profit in asking for or wanting what I had got?

There we lay, he and I, while the night wheeled round the earth, which was not sleeping, but was alert and awake. Some barrier that the past years thought they had set up between us was utterly battered down by those stirrings of spring, and all night I lay side by side with the boy that I had been. He whispered to me his surmises and his desires, as he conceived them in the wonder of spring nights, when he lay awake for the sheer excitement of being alive and of having the world in front of him. He wound himself more and more closely to me, nudging me with his elbow to drive into me the urgency of his schemes and dreams, and I recognized the reality of them. How closely he clung! How insistent was his demand that I should see with his eyes, and listen with his ears, and write with his

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hand. And, fool though he was, and little as I respected him, I could not help having a sort of tenderness for him and his youth and his eagerness and his ignorance.

"I want so awfully," he repeated. "Surely if I want a thing enough I shall get it. Isn't that so?"

"Yes; that is usually the case," said I.

"Well, I want as much as I *can* want," he said. "And yet, if you are what I shall be (and I feel that is so), you haven't got it yet. Why is that?"

"Perhaps you aren't wanting enough," said I. "To get it, would you give up everything else, would you live, if necessary, in squalor and friendlessness? Would you put up with complete failure, as the world counts failure?"

He drew a little away from me; his tense arm got slack and heavy.

"But there's no question of failure," he said. "If I get it, that means success."

"But it's a question of whether you will eagerly suffer anything that can happen sooner than relinquish your idea. Can you cling to your idea, whatever happens?"

He was silent a moment.

"I don't know," he said.

"That means you aren't wanting enough," said I. "And you don't take trouble enough. You never do."

"I wonder! Is that why you haven't got all I want?"

"Probably. One of the reasons, at any rate. An-

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other is that we are meant to fail. That's what we are here for. Just to go on failing, and go on trying again."

"Oh, how awfully sad! But I don't believe it."

"It's true. But it's also true that you have to go on acting as if you didn't believe it. You will get nothing done, if you believe it when you're young."

And do you believe it now?" he asked.

"Rather not. But it's true."

He left me and moved away to the window.

"It's the first night of spring," he said. "I must go and run through the night. Why don't you come too?"

"Because you can do it for me."

"Good-night then," he said, and jumped out of the window.

All the next morning spring vibrated in the air; the bulbs in the garden-beds felt the advent of the tremulous time, and pushed up little erect horns of vigorous close-packed leaf, and the great downs beyond the garden were already flushed with the vivid green of new growth, that embroidered itself among the grey faded autumn grass. A blackbird fluted in the thicket, a thrush ran twinkle-footed on to the lawn, and round the house-eaves in the ivy sparrows pulled about straws and dead leaves, practising for nesting-time; and the scent, oh, the scent of the moist earth! In these few hours the whole aspect of the world was changed, the stagnation of winter was gone, and though cold and frost might come

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back again, life was on the move; the great tide had begun to flow, that should presently flood the earth with blossom and bird-song. Never, even in the days when first the wand of spring was waved before my enchanted eyes, have I known its spell so rapturously working, nor felt a sweeter compulsion in its touch, which makes old men dream dreams and middle-aged men see visions so that all for an hour or two open the leaves of the rose-scented manuscript again, and hear once more the intoxicating music, and read with renewed eyes the rhapsody that is recited at the opening of the high mass of youth. The years may be dropping their snowflakes on to our heads, and the plough of time making long furrows on our faces, but never perhaps till the day when the silver bowl is broken, and the spirit goes to God Who gave it, must we fail to feel the thrill and immortal youth of the first hours of spring-time. And who knows whether all that this divine moment wakes in us here may not be but the faint echo, heard by half-awakened ears, the dim reflection, seen in a glass darkly of the everlasting spring which shall dawn on us then?

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MARCH, 1917.

NEVER has there been a March so compounded of squalls and snows and unseasonable inclemencies. Verily I believe that my *Lobgesang* of that spring day in February was maliciously transmitted to the powers of the air, and, so far from being pleased with my distinguished approval, they merely said: "Very well; we will see what else we can do, if you like our arrangements so much." Indeed, it looks like that, for we all know how the powers of Nature (the unpleasant variety of them) seem to concentrate themselves on the fact of some harmless individual giving a picnic, or other outdoor festivity, for which sun and fine weather is the indispensable basis. But now in a few days I shall defy them, for I do not believe that their jurisdiction extends to Italy.

Italy: yes, I said Italy, for at last an opportunity and a cause have presented themselves, and I am going out there "at the end of this month, D.V." (as the clergyman said), "or early in April, anyhow." Rome is the first objective, and then (or I am much mistaken) there will be an interval of Alatri, and then Rome again and Alatri again: a sumptuous sandwich. How I have longed for something of the sort in these two years and a half of insular northern existence I cannot hope to convey. Perhaps at

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last I have reached that point of wanting which ensures fulfilment, but though I am interested in fantastic psychology, I don't really care how the fulfilment came now that it has come.

I have had no word from Francis since his letter last month from the Italian front, announcing his departure for Rome. He mentioned that he hoped to go to Alatri, and since he did not give me his address in Rome, I telegraphed to the island, announcing my advent at the end of March or early in April. Rather to my surprise I got the following answer from Alatri:

"Was meaning to write. Come out end of March if possible. Shall be here."

For no very clear reason this somewhat perturbed me. There was no cause for perturbation, if one examined the grounds of disquietude, for if he was ill he would surely have told me so before. Far the more probable interpretation was that he had already forgotten about his discomforts and his very depressed letter, and was snatching a few rapturous days now and then from Rome, and spending them on the island. He might foresee that he could do this again at the end of the month, and wanted me to come then, because he would be back at the front in April. That all held water, whereas the conjecture that he was ill did not. But though I told myself this a good many times, I did not completely

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trust my rendering, and his silence both before and after this telegram was rather inexplicable. My reasonable self told me that there was no shadow of cause for anxiety, but something inside me that observed from a more intimate spy-hole than that of reason was not quite satisfied. However, as the days of March went by and the time for my departure got really within focus, this instinctive and unreasonable questioning grew less insistent, and finally, as if it had been a canary that annoyed me by its chatter, I put, so to speak, the green baize of reason quite over it and silenced it. Soon I shall be sitting on the pergola, where the shadows of the vine-leaves dance on the paving-stones, telling Francis how yet another of my famous presentiments had been added the list of failures.

And, indeed, there were plenty of other things to think about. Bellona, goddess of war, has come out of her winter reverie, where, with her mantle round her mouth, she has lain with steadfast eyes unclosed, waiting her time. All these last months she has but moved a drowsy hand, just sparring, but now she has sprung up and cast her mantle from her mouth, and yelled to her attendant spirits "Wake! for winter is gone and spring is here!" And, day by day, fresh news has come of larger movements and the stir of greater forces. In Mesopotamia an advance began late in February, and gathering volume, like an avalanche rushing down a snow-clad cliff, it thundered on with ever-increasing velocity till one morning we heard that the Baghdad city was reached and

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fell into the hands of the British expedition. And still it rolls on with its broad path swept clean behind it. . . .

Simultaneously the advance on the French front has continued, though without anything approaching a battle, as battles are reckoned nowadays. The Germans have been unable to hold their line, and retreating (I am sorry to say) in a masterly manner, have given us hundreds of square miles of territory. The ridge of Bapaume, which held out against the Somme offensive of last summer, has fallen into our hands; so, too, has Peronne. True to the highest and noblest precepts of *Kultur,* the enemy in their retreat have poisoned wells, have smashed up all houses and cottages with their contents, down to mirrors and chairs; have slashed to pieces the plants and trees in gardens, in vineyards and orchards; have destroyed by fire and bomb all that was destructible, and have, of course, taken with them women and girls. The movement has been on a very large scale, and the strategists who stay at home have been very busy over telling us what it all means, and the "best authority" has been very plentifully invoked. The optimist has been informed that the enemy have literally been blown out of their trenches, and tell us that a headlong retreat that will not stop till it reaches the Rhine has begun, while the pessimist sees in the movement only a strategical retreat which will shorten the German line, and enable the enemy both to send reinforcements to other fronts, and establish himself

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with ever greater security on what is known as the "Hindenburg Line." The retreat, in fact, according to the pessimist (and in this the published German accounts agree with him) is a great German success, which has rendered ineffective all the Allies' preparations for a spring offensive. According to the optimist, we have taken, the French and we, some three hundred square miles of territory, some strongly fortified German positions, at a minimum of cost. Out of all this welter of conflicting opinion two incontestable facts emerge, the one that the enemy was unable to hold their line, the other that their retreat has cost them very little in men, and nothing at all in guns.

In the midst of the excitement in the West has come a prodigious happening from Russia. For several days there had been rumours of riots and risings in Petrograd, but no authentic news came through till one morning we woke to find that a revolution had taken place, that the Tzar had abdicated for himself and the Tzarevitch, and that already a National Government had been established, which was speedily recognized by the Ambassadors of the various Powers. At one blow all the pro-German party in Russia, which had for its centre the ministers and intriguers surrounding the Imperial Family, had been turned out by the revolutionists, and the work that began with the murder of Rasputin at the end of December had been carried to completion. The Army and the Navy had declared for the new National Government, and the work of the

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National Government after the extirpation of German influence was to be the united effort of the Russian people to bring the war to a victorious close. The thing was done before we in the West knew any more than muttered rumours told us; it came to birth full-grown, as Athens was born from the head of Zeus. There are a thousand difficulties and dangers ahead, for the entire government of a huge people, involving the downfall of autocracy, cannot be changed as you change a suit of clothes, but the great thing has been accomplished, and at the head of affairs in Russia to-day are not the Imperial marionettes bobbing and gesticulating on their German wires, but those who represent the people. A thousand obscure issues are involved in the movement: we do not know for certain yet whether the Grand Duke Michael is Tzar of all the Russias, or the Grand Duke Nicholas the head of the Russian armies, or whether the whole family of Romanoffs have peeled off and thrown aside like an apple-paring; what is certain is that some form of national government has taken the place of a Germanized autocracy. How stable that will prove itself, and whether it will be able to set the derelict steam-roller at work again and start it on its way remains to be seen. For myself, I shout with the optimists, but certainly, if the crisis is over and there actually is now in power a firm and national Government, capable of directing the destinies of the country, it will have been the most wonderful revolution that ever happened.

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And then, even earlier than I had dared to hope, for I had not expected to get away before the last week in March, came that blessed moment, when one night at Waterloo Station the guard's whistle sounded, and we slid off down the steel ribands to Southampton. In itself, to any who has the least touch of the travelling or gipsy mind, to start on a long journey, to cross the sea, to go out of one country and into another where men think different thoughts and speak a different language, is one of the most real and essential refreshments of life, even when he leaves behind him peace and entertainment and content. For two years and a half, if you except those little niggardly journeys that are scarce worth while getting into the train for, I had lived without once properly moving, and, oh, the rapture of knowing that when I got out of this train, it was to get on to a boat, and when I got out of the boat (barring the exit entailed by a mine or a submarine), it would be to get into another train, and yet another train, and at the Italian frontier another train yet, all moving southwards. Then once more there would be a boat, and after that the garden at Alatri, and the stone-pine and Francis. Even had I been credibly informed by the angel Gabriel or some such unimpeachable authority that the chances were two to one that the Southampton boat would be torpedoed, I really believe I should have gone, and taken the other chance in the hope of getting safely across and, for the present, leaving England (which I love) and all the friends whom I love also, firmly

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and irrevocably behind. I wanted (as the doctors say) a change, not of climate only, but of everything else that makes up life, people and things and moral atmosphere and occupations. I was aware that there were some thousands of people then in London who wanted the same thing and could not get it, and I am afraid that that added a certain edge to ecstasy. To get away from the people I knew and from the nation to which I belonged was the very pith of this remission. A few hours ago, too, I had been hunting the columns of newspapers and watching the ticking tape to get the very last possible pieces of information about all the events of which I have just given the summary, and now part and parcel of my delight was to think that for many hours to come I should not see a tape or a newspaper. The war had been levelled at me, at point-blank range; for two years and a half I had never been certain that the very next moment some new report would not be fired at me (and, indeed, I intentionally drew such fire upon myself); but now I had got out of that London newspaper office, and was flying through the dark night southwards. Here in England everything was soaked in the associations of war (though the most we had seen of it was two or three futile Zeppelins), but in Alatri, which I had never known except in conditions of peace and serenity, its detonation and the smoke of its burning would surely be but a drowsy peal of thunder, a mist on the horizon, instead of that all-encompassing fog out of which leaped the flash of

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explosions. I wanted desperately, selfishly, unpatriotically, to get out of it all for a bit, and Alatri, in intervals of Rome, beckoned like the promised land. I am aware that a Latin poet tells us that a change of climate obtained by a sea-voyage does not alter a man's mind, but I felt convinced he was mistaken.

Throughout that delightful journey my expectations mounted. First came the windy quay at Southampton, the stealing out into the night with shuttered portholes, and in the early morning the arrival at Havre. Then for a moment I almost thought that some ghastly practical joke had been played on us passengers, and that we had put back again into a British port, so Anglicized and khakied did the town appear. But no such unseemly jest had been played, and that night I slept in Paris, and woke to find a chilly fog over that lucent city, which again sent qualms of apprehension through me, for fear that by some cantrip trick this might be London again, and my fancied journey but a dream. But the dream every hour proved itself real, for again I was in the train that started from the Gare de Lyon, and not from my bedroom or the top of the Eiffel Tower, as would have been the wont of dreams, and in due time there was Aix-les-Bains with its white poplars and silvery lake, and the long pull upwards to Modane, and the great hillside through which the tunnel went, with wreaths of snow still large on its northern slopes, and when we came out of the darkness again, we had passed into the "land of lands." The mountain valleys were

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still grey with winter, but it was Italy; and presently, as we sped clanking downwards, the chestnut trees were in leaf, and the petroleum tins stood on the rails of wooden balconies with carnations already in bud, and on the train was a *risotto* for lunch and a dry and abominable piece of veal, which, insignificant in themselves, were like some signal that indicated Italy. The dry veal and the *risotto* and the budding chestnut trees and the unwearied beneficence of the sun were all signals of the Beloved: tokens of the presence that, after so long, I was beginning to realize again. And then the great hopeless station of Turin happened, where nobody can ever find the place he wants, and trains steal out from the platform where he has left them, and hide themselves again, guarded by imperious officials in cocked hats at subtly-concealed side tracks, escaping the notice, like prudent burglars, of intending travellers. There were shrill altercations and immediate reconcilements, and polite salutings, and finally the knowledge that all was well, and I found my hat and my coat precisely where I had left them, as in some conjuring trick, in the identical compartment (though it and the train had moved elsewhere), and again we slid southwards. There were olive-trees now, green in a calm air, and grey when the wind struck them, and little ruined castles stuck on the tops of inaccessible hills, and houses painted pink, and stone-walled vineyards, and dust that came in through the windows, but it was the beloved Italian dust. Then came the sea again on

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the right-hand side of the train (only here was the magic of the Mediterranean), and the stifle of innumerable tunnels, punctuated with glimpses of Portofino, swimming in its hump-backed way out into the tideless sea, and the huddle of roofs at Rapallo, and the bridge at Zoagli, and the empty sands at Sestri, and the blue-jackets crowding the platform at Spezzia. All this was real; a dream, though the reality was as ecstatic as a dream, could not have produced those memories in their exact order and their accurate sequence, and when, next morning, I awoke somewhere near Rome, I thought that the years of war-time were the nightmare, and this golden morning which shone on fragments of ancient aqueducts and knuckled fig-trees was but the resumption of what had been before the unquiet night possessed and held me. Here again, as three years ago, was the serene wash of sun and southern air, untroubled and real and permanent. I could open my mouth and draw in my breath. Dimly I remembered the fogs of the north, and almost as dimly the fact that Italy was at war too, striving to put her foot on that damnable centipede that had emerged from Central Europe to bite and to sting and to claw all that resented its wrigglings and prevented its poisoning of the world.

I found that after four days in Rome I was free (except for a wallet of papers which required attention), to go wherever I pleased for the inside of a week, and you may judge where next the train took

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me. That morning I had sent to Francis news of my escape from Rome (how delirious "an escape from Rome" would have sounded a month ago), and the same evening, across the flames of the sunset, I saw the peaks and capes of the island, shaped like a harp lying on its back, grow from dimmest outline of dream-shape into distinctness again. There on the left was the lower horn of it, plunged into the sea; then came the inward curve, sloping downwards to the grey cluster of the town, where the fingers of the player would be, and it swelled upwards again into the larger horn which formed the top of it. Never for more than a moment, I think, did my eyes leave some part of that exquisite shape. How often in the lower horn of it had Francis and I sat perched on that little platform by the gilded statue of Our Lady, looking landwards across the blue plain of sea towards the streamer of smoke from the truncated volcano, or to the coastland northwards, where the port was whitely strung like a line of pearls along the shore of the bay. Just below the other horn is the divinest bathing-place that the world holds; on a rock a hundred yards from the shore there is a little cave, curtained by seaweed, and in it is a tin box where shall be found two cigarettes and matches to match. Those were to have been lit and smoked within two months of their concealment there, and that date has now long been buried beneath the three years' landslide of war. The matches will certainly be a mildewed fricassée of wood pulp and phosphorus, the cigarettes

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an almost more ignoble glue of paper and tobacco but to-morrow morning I swear that Francis and I will swim there, and unearth the remains of the serene days before the war, and recapture the *feel* that there was in the world before the Prussian centipede went forth on his doomed errand. Francis, I know, will hate swimming so early in the year as this, for he is a midsummer bather; but surely one who has been through the horrors of Gallipoli and earned the V.C. in France will not absolutely refuse to go through this ordeal by water for the sake of the recovery of the peace-cache. If it is possible to feel certain of anything, it is that to-morrow morning, whatever the weather, two futile Englishmen, as happy as they are silly, will swim out to the rock below the higher horn of the harp, and verify the existence of a tin box.

The shores grew clearer, and at last through a thin low-lying haze of sunset we passed into the clear shadow of the island, and the houses and pier of the Marina on which Teresa stood to welcome the return of her *promesso*, who was stricken to death as he was clasped in her outstretched arms, defined themselves with the engraved sharpness of evening in the south. As we entered this zone of liquid twilight, I could see the fishing boats drawn up on the beach, the open arch of the funicular station, the crowd on the quay awaiting the mild daily excitement of the boat from the mainland, and at the sight of all those things, unchanged and peaceful, I had for the moment more strongly than ever the

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sense that there had been no war and there was no war, and that I should presently step back into the days that preceded those nightmare years. In a moment now I shall be able to distinguish a tall white-flannelled figure, who will wave his hat as he catches sight of me in the bow of the first disembarking boat that comes from the steamer, and he will move forward to the steps, and he will say "Hullo!" and I shall say "Hullo!" as I step ashore to find that to-day is linked on without break to the summer of 1914 when I was here last. I may have been to Naples for a night, or did I only leave by the morning boat to-day? I really do not know. . . .

And then I saw that Francis was not among the little group of islanders on the quay. Probably he had not got the telegram I sent from Rome to-day, for the postmaster of Alatri is no friend to telegrams, and, as I have often thought, keeps one in his desk for a day or two, in order to teach you not to be in such a hurry. And when he thinks you have learned your lesson, he has it delivered, two or three days afterwards, among your letters. But in spite of this perfectly adequate method of accounting for the undoubted fact that Francis had not come to meet the boat, I felt an inward resurgence of the uneasiness with which I had received his request that I should come out in March if possible, and not wait till April. I had accounted for that at the time by a reasonable explanation, and I could account, also reasonably, for his absence. But I could now, as the funicular railway drew us up like

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a bucket from the well, into the higher sunlit slopes of the island, account for both by one and the same explanation. He was ill when last he wrote. . . .

I found a porter in the Piazza, who shouldered my luggage, and I went on ahead, striving to convince myself, with quite decent success, that I was being afraid "even where no fear was," and yielded myself up, though I walked briskly in order to put an end to my ominous surmises, to the enchantment of the hour, and of the sense that I really had arrived again. The little huddled town, with the Piazza from the doors and arches of which any moment the chorus of light-opera might issue with short skirts and "catchy" chorus, was quite unchanged, save that at this hour of sunset it used always to be guttural with Teutonic tourists, and a place to be avoided by the genuine islander. Unchanged, too, was the narrow street, where two could scarcely walk abreast, that led out to the hillside on which the villa was perched; there was the narrow slit of blue overhead, and the vegetable shop and the tobacconist's and the *trattoria* with the smell of spilt wine issuing from it and the lean cat blinking at the doorway. The same children apparently ran up against one's legs, the tailor was putting up his shutters, and two Americans, as always, were buying picture-postcards at the stationer's. The path dipped downwards, ran level between olive groves and villas, made a right turn and a left turn, and there above me was the flight of steps that led steeply up by the white-washed wall of the garden, and above the wall, still

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catching the last rays of the sun, was the stone-pine, and behind it, greyish-white and green-shuttered, the house, where in a minute now Francis would welcome me. My bedroom shutters I saw were open, and blankets were being aired on the window-sill, and this looked as if I was expected.

I opened the garden gate, pulling at the string that lifted the latch inside, and a great wave of the scent of wallflower and freesias poured over me, warm from their day-long sunning underneath the southern wall, and intoxicatingly sweet. And even as I inhaled the first breath of it, a woman came out of the dining-room door that opens on to the terrace. She was dressed in the uniform of a hospital nurse.

"We were expecting you," she said, speaking with that precise utterance of foreigners. "I hope you have had a good journey."

The scent of the freesias suddenly sickened me.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "What has happened?"

"He wants to tell you himself," she said.

"He? And is it serious?"

She looked at me with that calm, untroubled sympathy that is the reward of those who give up their lives to mitigate suffering.

"Yes," she said. "It is very serious. Will you go up and see him now?"

"Surely. Where is he?"

"In his bedroom. The third door along the passage. Ah, I forgot; of course you know."

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He was lying much propped up in bed, opposite the open window, and as he turned towards the door at my entry, I thought that this must be some wicked, inexplicable joke, so radiant and young and normal was his face.

"Ah, that's splendid!" he said. "It was ripping getting your telegram this morning."

"Francis, what's the matter?" I asked. "Why are you in bed? Why is there a nurse here?"

He had not let go of my hand, and now he clasped it more closely.

"I'll tell you the end first," he said; "quickly; just in one word. I'm dying. I can't live more than a few weeks."

There was a moment's silence, not prolonged, but at the end of it I felt that I had known this for years.

"Will you hear all about it from the beginning?" he asked. "Or would it bore you?"

He was so perfectly normal that there was really nothing left but to be normal too, or it may be that a great shock stuns your emotional faculties for a while. But I do not think it was that with me now. It was Francis's intense serenity and happiness that infected and enveloped me.

"I can't tell whether it would bore me or not," I said, "until I hear it."

"Then make yourself comfortable for about half an hour," he said. "But stop me when you like."

"It was very soon after I came out to Italy," he said, "that I kept getting attacks of the most infer-

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nal pain. Then they ceased to be attacks; at least, they attacked all the time. It was about then, when it was worst, that I wrote you a pig of a letter. Wasn't it?"

"It was rather."

"Yes. I was pretty bad in other ways as well, which I'll tell you of afterwards. At present this is just physical. I had an awful dread all the time in my mind what this might be, though I kept saying it was indigestion. Then I went down to Rome and saw Schiavetti, the doctor. And I can't describe to you—though it may sound odd—what a relief it was to know for certain that my fears were correct. The worst I had feared was true, but anyhow, the fear, the apprehension were gone. When you are up against a thing, you may dislike it very much, but you don't fear the possibility of it any longer. It's there; and nothing, even the worst, is as bad as suspense. I've got cancer."

He looked radiantly at me.

"That was one relief," he said, "and on the top of it came another. It was quite impossible to operate. I needn't be afraid of being cut about. All the surgery that I have had or will have is the morphia needle, which, when you are in bad pain, is neither more nor less than heaven. But I haven't wanted the morphia needle for the last fortnight, and they think I shan't want it again. After a few horrible weeks the pain grew much less, and then ceased altogether. I doze and sleep most of the time now, and when I wake it is to an ecstasy. I don't want to die,

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it isn't that, and I don't want to live. But that complete absence of desire isn't apathy at all. It's just the divinest content you can imagine. It's true that I wanted to see you, and here you are."

An idea suddenly struck me.

"Then there's something happened to you," said I, "which is not physical."

"Ah! I wondered if you would think of that. Guess once more."

It was no question of guessing; I knew.

"You have passed through the dark night of the soul."

He laughed.

"Yes; that's it. And that explains a thing you must have been asking yourself, why I didn't write to tell you when I knew what was the matter with me. I couldn't. For among other things, which I will tell you of, I had the absolute conviction that you wouldn't come, and wouldn't want to be bothered. That's a decent specimen of the pleasures of the dark night."

He turned a little in bed.

"But I wouldn't have been spared the dark night for all the treasures of heaven," he said. "Out of His infinite Love Christ Jesus let me know something of what He felt when He said, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' I remember once we talked about it, and it is summed up in the sense of utter darkness and utter loneliness. My mind reasoned it all out, and came to the absolute conclusion that there was nothing: there was neither

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love anywhere nor God anywhere, nor honour, nor decency. Had I been physically capable of it, there was no pleasure, carnal and devilish, that I would not have plucked at. At least, I think I should, but perhaps that would not have seemed worth while. I didn't, anyhow, because I was in continual pain. But all that I believed, all the amazing happiness that I had enjoyed from such knowledge of God as I had attained to, was completely taken from me. I could remember it dimly, as in some nonsensical dream. My mind, I thought, must have been drugged into some hysterical sentimental mood; but now, clearly and lucidly it saw how fantastic its imagination had been. I went deeper and deeper into the horror of great darkness, and I suppose that it was just that (namely, that my spirit knew that existence without God *was* horror) which was my means of rescue. I still clung blindly and without hope to something that my whole mind denied. It was precisely in the same way that I telegraphed to you to come in March if you could. My mind knew for certain that you didn't care, but I did that.

"It was just about then that I had forty-eight hours of the worst pain I had ever known. The morphia had no effect, and I lay here in a sweat of agony. But in the middle of it the dark night lifted off my soul and it was morning. I can't give you any idea of that, for it happened from outside me, just as dawn comes over the hills. And even while my physical anguish was at its worst, I lay here in

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a content as deep as that which I have now, with you sitting by me, and that delicious sense of physical lassitude which comes when you are resting after a hard day.

"Next day the pain began to get better, and two days afterwards it was gone. It has never come back since. I am glad of that, for it is quite beastly. But what matters more is that the dark night is gone. And that can't come back, because I know that the dawn that came to me after it was the dawn of the everlasting day."

He paused a moment.

"And that's all," he said.

He grew drowsy after this, and presently his nurse, a nun from a convent in the mainland, settled him for the night. Seraphina came from the kitchen after I had dined, and wept a little, and told me how Francis, *"il santo signorino,"* saw her every day, and took no less interest than before in her affairs and the little everyday things. Pasqualino was at the war, and the new boy who waited at dinner was a fat-head, as no doubt I had noticed, and Caterina (if so be I remembered about Caterina and Pasqualino and the baby) was in good service, and the baby throve amazingly. Provisions were dear; you had to take a foolish card with you when you wanted sugar, but the vegetables were coming on well, and we should not do so badly. The Signorino liked to hear all the news, and, if God willed, he would have no more pain; but she wished

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he would eat more, and then perhaps he would get his strength back, and cheat the undertaker after all. There was a cousin of hers who had done just that; he was dying, they all said, and then, *Dio!* all of a sudden he got better from the moment Seraphina had cooked him a great beefsteak for his dinner.

To those who have loved the lovely and the jolly things of this beautiful world, the day of little things is never over, and next morning, at Francis's request, I went down to the bathing-beach with orders not to mind if the water was chilly, but swim out to the rock of the cache and bring the tin box home. From his window he could not see the garden itself, but only the pine-tree, but would it not be possible to fix a looking-glass on the slant in the window-sill, so that from his bed he could see as well as smell the freesias and the narcissus and the wallflowers? The success of this made him want to see more, and now that the weather was warm, there surely could not be any harm in transplanting him, bed and all, on to the paved platform at the end of the pergola, and letting him spend the rest of his days and nights in the garden. With a few sheets of canvas, to be let down at night, and could we not engineer a room for him there? He often used to sleep out there before. The question was referred to the nurse and met with her approval and that of the doctor; so that afternoon we made everything ready, and by tea-time had carried him out on his mattress with the aid of Seraphina and the fat-

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head, to his great contentment. This out-of-door bedroom was screened from the north by the house, and between the pillars of the pergola to east and south and west the nimble fingers of Seraphina had rigged up curtains of canvas that could be drawn or withdrawn according to the weather, while overhead was the matting underneath which we dined in the summer. The electric light was handy to his bed, and on the table by it was a bell with which he could summon the nurse, who slept in the bedroom overlooking the pergola. His bedside books stood there also: "Alice in Wonderland," a New Testament, "Emma," and a few more. The stone-pine whispered to the left of his bed, and the wind that stirred there blew in the wonderful fragrance of the spring-flowering garden.

Francis had been very drowsy all day, but for an hour that evening we talked exactly as we might have talked nearly three years ago, before the flame of war had scorched Europe. There were plans we had been making then for certain improvements in the house, and those we discussed anew. We spoke of the odd story concerning the footstep that walked in the studio, and wondered if the *strega* would be heard again; the tin box, which I had obediently fetched from its cache, was opened; Seraphina came out with commissariat suggestions for next day, and the news that Pasqualino had got a week's leave and would be here several days before Easter to see the *bambino* on which he had never yet set eyes. Soon the stars began to appear in the darkening

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night-blue of the sky, and the breeze from the garden bore in no longer the scent of open flowers, but the veiled fragrance of their closing, and the smell of the damp earth, irrigated by the heavy dew, came with it. . . .

We talked of pleasant and humorous little memories of the past, and plans for the future, just as if we were spending one of the serene summer evenings the last time we were here together, three years ago, and it seemed perfectly natural to do so. Among those plans for the future there came up the question of my movements, and we settled that I should go back to Rome the day after to-morrow, and return here if possible for Easter.

"For that," said Francis cheerfully, "will be about the end of my tether. The end of it, I mean, in the sense that I shan't be tethered any more. Oh, and there's one thing I forgot. Be sure you go to some medium about the packet I sealed up on the last time I was in England. Don't you remember? We both sealed up a packet?"

"Oh, don't!" said I. "I hate the thought of it."

"But you mustn't shirk," he said. "If it had been you, not me, I shouldn't have shirked. You've got to go to some medium, and see if he can tell you what's in my packet. And the interesting thing is that I can't remember for the life of me what I put there, and certainly nobody else knows. So if any medium can tell you what's inside it, it will really be extremely curious. Mind you tell me—oh, I forgot."

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"Would you mind not being quite so horrible?" I said.

"I'm not horrible. If anybody is being horrible it's you in not feeling that I shall be living, not only as much as before, but much more. I say, do get hold of that."

"Yes, I'll try. But the flesh is weak."

He was silent a moment.

"It's through weakness that His strength is made perfect," he said. "And here's my nurse coming to settle me. What a jolly talk we've had!"

I got up.

"Good-night, then," I said.

"Good-night. Sleep as well as I shall."

It was still early and I went to the studio to read a little before I went to bed. But I found a book was not a thing one could attend to, and I sat doing nothing, scarcely even thinking. I did not want to think; all I wanted to do was to *look at* what was going on here. Thought, with its perplexities and conjectures and burrowings, did not touch the heart of the situation. I could only contemplate; the best friend I had in the world lay dying, and yet there must be no sorrow. He was too utterly triumphant; banners and trumpets were assembling for his passing, and he called on the joy of the world to congratulate him. He was not dying, in his view, any more than a man dies who leaves a little sphere for a larger one. Death was not closing in upon him, but opening out for him! I saw him walking, not through a dark valley, but upon hill-tops at the

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approach of dawn, and soon for him the dim night world would burst into light and colour. Already had he been through the night, and now he lay there with morning in his eyes, assured of day. All that he waited for now was the dimming of the terrestrial stars, and the flooding with sun of the infinite heavens. He knew it; all I could decently do was to try to look at it through his eyes and not through my own, which were blinded with tears that should never have been shed. . . .

I did not doubt the truth of his conviction, I knew it in my bones. But the flesh on my bones was weak, and it cried out for him.

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APRIL, 1917.

It was on the evening of the Thursday before Easter that I got back to Alatri. Once more the outline of the island, that had been a soft cloud-like shape afloat on the sea, grew distinct, and before we got there it lay dark against an orange sunset and a flame of molten waters. There stood the little crowd on the pier waiting the steamer's arrival, but to-night I needed not to look for Francis among them. During the last ten days I had had frequent news from his nurse, always of the same sort: he suffered no more pain, but each day he was sensibly weaker. But there among the crowd stood Pasqualino very smart in his Bersaglieri uniform; he had come down to meet me with a similar message. He had arrived two days before on a week's leave, and, so he told me, spent most of the day up at the villa, helping in the house and weeding in the garden. Sometimes when the Signorino was awake he called to him, and they talked about all manner of things, as in the good days before he was ill and before the accursed war came. "And shall we all be as happy as the Signorino when we come to our last bed?" asked Pasqualino.

There was a great change in Francis since ten days ago; he had drifted far on the tide that was carrying

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him so peacefully away. He just recognized me, said a few words, and then dozed off again into the stupor in which he had lain all day. Through the morning of Good Friday also, and into the afternoon he lay unconscious. But now for the first time his sleep was troubled, and he kept stirring and muttering to himself, unintelligibly for the most part, though now and then there came a coherent sentence. Some inner consciousness, I think, was aware of what day this was, for once he said, "It was I, my Lord, who scourged Thee, and crowned Thee with the thorns of many sorrows." During these hours the nurse and I remained at his bedside, for his breathing was difficult, and his pulse very feeble, and it was possible that at any moment the end might come. Pasqualino went softly about the garden barefooted, doing his weeding, and once or twice came to look at his Signorino. A cat dozed in the hot sunshine, the lizards scuttled about the pillars of the pergola, and in the stone-pine a linnet sang.

But about three o'clock in the afternoon his breathing grew more quiet, his pulse grew stronger, and he slept an untroubled sleep for another hour. After that he awoke, and that evening and all Saturday morning he was completely conscious and brimming over with a serene happiness. Sometimes we talked, sometimes I read to him out of "Emma," or "Alice in Wonderland," and during the afternoon he asked me to read him the few verses in St. John about Easter Eve.

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"Do come very early to-morrow morning," he said, when this was done, "and read the next chapter, the Easter morning chapter."

I put down the Bible, still open, on his table.

"Very well," I said, "I'll come at sunrise. But aren't you tired now? You've been talking and listening all day."

"Yes; I'll go to sleep for a bit. And won't you go for a walk? You always get disagreeable towards evening if you've had no exercise."

"Where shall I go?" I asked.

He thought a moment, smiling.

"Go to the very top of Monte Gennaro," he said, "to get the biggest view possible, and stand there and in a loud voice thank God for everything that there is. Say it for yourself and for me. Say 'Francis and I give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.' That's about all that there is to say, isn't it?"

"I can't think of anything else."

"Off you go, then," he said. "Oh, Lor'! I wish I was coming too. But I'll go to sleep instead. Good-bye."

I woke very early next morning, before sunrise, with the impression that somebody had called to me from outside, and putting on a coat, I went out into the garden to see whether it was Francis's voice that I heard. But he lay there fast asleep, and I supposed that the impression that I had been called was but part of a dream. Overhead the stars were beginning

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to burn dim in a luminous sky, and in the East the sober dove-colour of dawn was spreading upwards from the horizon, growing brighter every moment. Very soon now the sun would rise, and as I had promised to come out then and read Francis the chapter in St. John about the Resurrection morning, it was not worth while going back to bed again.

So waiting for him to awake, I took up the Bible, which still lay open on his table where I had laid it yesterday, with "Emma" and "Alice in Wonderland," and as I waited I read to myself the verses that I should presently read aloud to him. Just as I began the first ray of the sun overtopped the steep hill-side to the East, and shone full on the page. It did not yet reach the bed where Francis lay asleep.

"And when she had thus said, she turned herself and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

"Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She supposing him to be the gardener . . ."

At that moment I looked up, for I thought I heard footsteps coming towards me along the terrace, and it crossed my mind that this was Pasqualino arriving very early to help in the house and garden, though, as it was Sunday, I had not expected him. But there was no one visible; only at the entrance to the pergola, which was still in shadow, there seemed to be a faint column of light. I saw no more than that, and the impression was

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only vague and instantaneous, and perhaps the first sunray on the book had dazzled me. . . .

And then I looked there no more, for a stir of movement from the bed made me turn, and I saw Francis sitting up with his hands clasped together in front of him. And whether it was but the glory of the terrestrial dawn that now shone on his face or the day-spring of the light invisible, so holy a splendour illuminated it that I could but look in amazement on him. He was gazing with bright and eager eyes to the entrance of the pergola, and in that moment I knew that he saw there Him whom Mary supposed to be the gardener.

Then his clasped hands quivered, and in a voice tremulous with love and with exultation:

"Rabboni!" he said, and his joyful soul went forth to meet his Lord.

Never have I felt the place so full of his dear and living presence as in the days that followed. It was so little of him that we laid in the Eglish cemetery here, no more than the discarded envelope which he had done with, and the love of our comradeship seemed but to have been more closely knit. Day after day, and all day long, Francis was with me in an intensity of actual presence that never lost its security or its serenity. For a week I remained there, and hourly throughout it I expected to see him in bodily form or to hear the actual sound of his voice. But I am sure that no appearance of him, such as we call a ghost, or any hearing of his voice,

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could possibly have added to the reality of his companionship. What those laws are which sometimes permit us to be conscious with physical eye or ear of someone who has passed over that stream which daily seems to me more narrow, we do not certainly know; but never before did I realize how little the mere satisfaction of vision or audition matters, when the inward sense of the presence of the dead is so vivid. Nor was it I alone who felt this, for Seraphina has told me how often in those days she would hear the stir of a rattled door-handle or steps along the kitchen passage when she was at her cooking, and look round, expecting to see "her Signorino," before she recollected that she would see him no more. It was the same with Pasqualino, and, oddly enough, though the islanders are full of superstitious terror of the dead, and avoid certain places as haunted and uncanny, neither she nor he felt the slightest fear at the thought of seeing Francis, but looked round for him with bright eager faces which disappointment clouded again.

And for me he was always there: in that hot blink of premature summer he came down to bathe, and lay beside me on the beach; he swam with me to the rock of the cache; he sat with me at meals; one afternoon he came up to the top of Monte Gennaro, to pick the orchises of the spring and to say his Gloria for himself. There was no break at all in our companionship; indeed, it but seemed, as I have said, to have grown intenser and more vivid. And that which, when he lay dying, seemed quite im-

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possible, namely, that I should come back to the island and the villa again now that I should not find him here, has become perfectly natural, since I shall most assuredly find him here. He will be with me in England, too, and wherever I may go during the period of my mortal days, I shall find him, not by any act of faith that the dead die not, nor by any theoretical conviction that his individuality survives, but from the plain experience that it is so. . . . And when the dimness and the dream of life vanish from my awakening vision, I know also that among the first who will give me welcome will be Francis, and his grey merry eyes will greet me. . . .

I arrived back to a cold and snowy England towards the end of the month, and as soon as I got home unlocked the drawer in which I had placed on a certain day last January the two "posthumous packets," as Francis called them, which we had severally prepared. As the reader may remember, we had packed them to serve as a test concerning the possibility of spirit-communication, and in mine I had placed a "J" nib, a five-franc piece and some carbolic tooth-powder, and had written directions on it that it was to be sent to him to deal with in the event of my dying first. While I was doing this upstairs, he was making ready his packet in the sitting-room, and on my return gave it me wrapped up and bound with string and sealed. There in its drawer it had lain till to-day, and the time was now come when the test could be put. The box in

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which he had disposed a certain object or objects unknown to me was some six inches long, and about the same across.

I at once went to a friend who is much immersed in spiritualistic affairs, and asked him to arrange a sitting for me with some medium whom he believed to have power, and believed not to be fraudulent. (It did not really matter whether the medium was fraudulent or not, since no amount of trickery could discover the contents of that package.) I asked that my name should not be given, but that a sitting should be arranged on some appointed day. I begged him, finally, to come with me, so that between us we might get a fairly complete account of what occurred, and to be a witness. I may add that I was not at all sanguine as to anything occurring.

Accordingly a few days afterwards Jack Barrett arrived, and together we drove off to the medium's house. The packet that Francis had made still lay in the locked drawer of a black oak table, and I said no word to my friend either about Francis, whom he had known slightly, or about the packet.

The procedure was of the kind common to trance-mediums. We sat in a small front-room of a rather dingy house in a dull respectable street. The room was partially darkened by the drawing of curtains over the window, but there was a bright fire burning on the hearth, and a lamp turned low was placed for my friend and me on a small round table, so that

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we could see sufficiently to write without difficulty. The medium herself was a pleasant-looking woman, about thirty years of age, with a slight cockney accent and a quiet level voice. Before the sitting began she made us an explanation of her powers, which I will give for what it is worth. Since she was a child she had often gone off into queer trances, which she could induce at will. When she awoke from them, she never knew more than that she had been having very vivid dreams, and talking to unknown people, but all recollection of what had passed instantly faded from her memory. Subsequently she married and had one child, a girl, who died at the age of ten. But, going into a trance a day or so after her death, the mother was aware when she awoke that she had been talking to her child. Thereafter she cultivated her gift, getting her husband or a friend to sit with her when she was in trance, and listen to and take down what she said. When in trance she spoke in Daisy's voice, not in her own, and the dead child told her about its present state of existence. Daisy described other dead people whom she came across, and could transmit messages from them. Such was Mrs. Masters's account of her gift.

She asked me only one question, and that was whether I wanted to get into communication with a dead friend. I told her that this was so, and then quite suddenly found myself harbouring a strong distaste for all these proceedings. I should certainly have gone away and had no sitting at all, if I had

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not recollected my promise to Francis to go through with it. It seemed to me like taking some sacred thing into a place of ill-fame. . . .

All that follows is a compilation from our joint notes, and I have inserted nothing which did not appear in the notes or in the recollection of both of us.

The medium sat close to me in a high chair opposite the fire, so that her face was clearly visible. Her eyes were closed and she had her hands on her lap. For about five minutes she remained thus, and then her breathing began sensibly to quicken; she gasped and panted, and her hands writhed and wrestled with each other. That passed, and she sat quite quiet again.

Presently she began to whisper to herself, and though I strained my ears to listen, I could catch no words. Very soon her voice grew louder, but it was a perfectly different voice from that in which she had spoken to us before. . . . It was a high childish treble, with a little lisp in it. The first coherent words were these:

"Yes, I'm here. Daisy's here. What shall I tell you about?"

"Ask her," said Barrett to me.

"I want to know if you can tell me anything about a friend of mine," I said.

"Yes, here he comes," she said.

She then told us that he—whoever it was—was in the room, and was looking into my face, and was rather puzzled because I did not appear to see him.

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He put his hand on my shoulder and was talking to me and smiling, and again seemed puzzled that I could not hear him. She proceeded to describe him at length with very great accuracy, and presently, in answer to a question, spelled out the whole of his name quite correctly. She told us that he had not long passed over; he had been on this side but a few weeks before, that he had died not in England, and not fighting, but he was connected with fighting. She said he was talking about an island in the sea, and about bathing, and about a garden where he had died; did I not recollect all those things?

Now so far all that had been told us could easily be arrived at and accounted for by mind-reading. All those things were perfectly well known to me, and contributed no shred of proof with regard to spirit-communication. For nearly an hour the medium went on in this manner, telling me nothing that I did not know already, and before the hour was up I had begun to weary of the performance. As a whole it was an extraordinary good demonstration of thought-reading, but nothing more at all. Indeed, I had ceased to take notes altogether, though Barrett's busy pencil went writing on, when quite suddenly I took my own up again, and attended as intently as I possibly could.

Francis told her, she said, that there was a test, and the test was in a box, and the box was in a big black drawer. "It's a test, he says it's a test," she repeated several times.

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Then she stopped, and I could hear her whispering again.

"But it's silly, it's nonsense," she said. "It doesn't mean anything."

She laughed, and spoke again out loud.

"He says, 'Bow, wow, wow! Puss,'" she said. "He says, 'Gott strafe the V.C.' He says it's a parrot. He says it's a grey feather of a parrot and something else besides. Something about burning, he says. He says it's a cinder. It's a cinder and a parrot's feather. That's what he says is the test."

It was not long after this that the coherent speaking ceased and whisperings began again. Presently the medium said, still in the child's voice, that the power was getting less. Then the voice stopped altogether, and soon afterwards I saw her hands twisting and wrestling together. She stretched out her arms with the air of a tired woman, and rubbed her eyes, and came out of trance.

My friend and I went home, and before we opened the box we compared and collated our notes. Then I unlocked the drawer, took out Francis's packet and broke the seals and cut the string. The cardboard box contained a piece of paper folded round one of Matilda's grey feathers and a fragment of burned coal.

Now I see no possible way of accounting for this unless we accept Mrs. Masters's explanation, and believe that in some mysterious manner Francis, his living self, was able to tell her while in this trance

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what were the contents of the packet he had sealed up. No possible theory of thought-transference between her and anyone living in the conditions of this earthly plane will fit the case, for the simple reason that no one living here and now has ever had the smallest knowledge of what the packet contained. That information had never, until the moment that Mrs. Masters communicated it to me and my friend, been known to more than one person. Francis had made the packet, had sealed it up, and in that locked drawer it had remained till we opened it after this sitting. I can conceive of no possible channel of communication except one, namely, that Francis himself spoke in some mysterious way to the medium's mind. My reason and my power of conjecture are utterly unable to think of any other explanation.

So accepting that (for a certain reason to be touched on later, I rather shrink from accepting it), it follows as possible that all the earlier part of the sitting, which can certainly be accounted for by the established phenomenon of thought-transference, may not have been due to thought-transference at all, but to direct communication also with Francis. And yet while the medium was speaking, telling me that he was looking into my face, and wondering that I could not see him, I, who have so continually with me the sense of his personal presence, had no such feeling. That Francis whom I knew, the same one who is now so constantly with me, did not seem to be there at all. . . .

Now I reject altogether the theory of the Roman

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Catholic Church, namely, that when we try to communicate with the dead and apparently succeed in so doing, we are not really brought into connection with them, but into connection with some evil spirit who impersonates them. I cannot discover or invent the smallest grounds for believing that; it seems to me more a subject for some gruesome magazine tale than a spiritual truth. But what does seem possible is this, that we are brought into connection not with the soul of the departed, his real essential personality, the thing we loved, but with a piece of his mere mechanical intelligence. Otherwise it is hard to see why those who have passed over rarely, if ever, tell us, except in the vaguest and most unconvincing manner, about the conditions under which they now exist. They speak of being happy, of being busy, of waiting for us, but they tell us nothing that the medium could not easily have invented herself. No *real* news comes, nothing that can enable us to picture in the faintest degree what their life over there is like. Possibly the conditions are incommunicable; they may find it as hard to convey them as it would be to convey the sense and the effect of colour to a blind man. Material and temporal terms must naturally have ceased to bear any meaning to them, since they have passed out of this infinitesimal sphere of space and time into the timeless and immeasurable day, the sun of which for ever stands at the height of an imperishable noon. If they could tell us of that, perhaps we should not understand.

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The upshot, then, is this: I believe that when the medium, sitting opposite the fire in that dim room, said what was in the sealed packet, the discarnate mind of Francis told her what was there. I believe the door between the two worlds not to be locked and barred; certain people—such as we call mediums—have the power of turning the handle and for a little setting this door ajar. But what do we get when the door is set ajar? Nothing that is significant, nothing that brings us closer to those on the other side. If I had not already believed in the permanence and survival of individual life, I think it more than possible that the accurate and unerring statement of what was in the sealed packet might have convinced me of it. But it brought me no nearer Francis.

* * * * * *

A great event has happened, for America has joined the cause of the Allies. That was long delayed, but there is now no possibility of doubting the wisdom of such delay, if from it sprang the tremendous enthusiasm which shows how solid is the nation's support. What this event means to the cause of the Allies cannot be over-estimated, for already it is clear that Russia is as unstable as a quicksand, and none knows what will be swallowed up next in those shifting, unfathomable depths. There is something stirring there below, and the first cries of liberty and unity which hailed the revolution have given place to queer mutterings, unconjecturable sounds. . . .

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April is nearly over, and spring, which came so late here in England that long after Easter the land lay white under unseasonable snows, has suddenly burst out into full choir of flower and bird-song. The blossoms that should have decked last month, the daffodils that should have "taken the winds of March with beauty," have delayed their golden epiphany till now, and it is as if their extra month of sleep had given them a vigour and a beauty that spring never saw before. The April flowers are here too, and the flowers of May have precociously joined them, and never was there such bustle among the birds, such hurried transport of nest-building material. But through all the din of the forest-murmurs sounds the thud of war.

How still it was on that Easter morning. . . .

THE END

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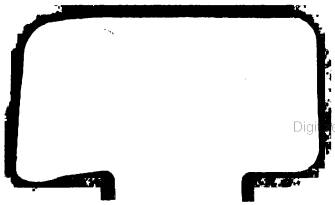

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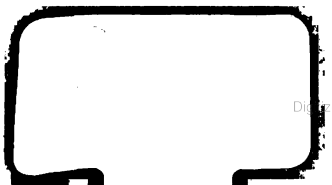

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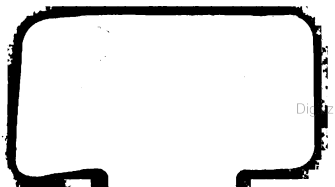

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